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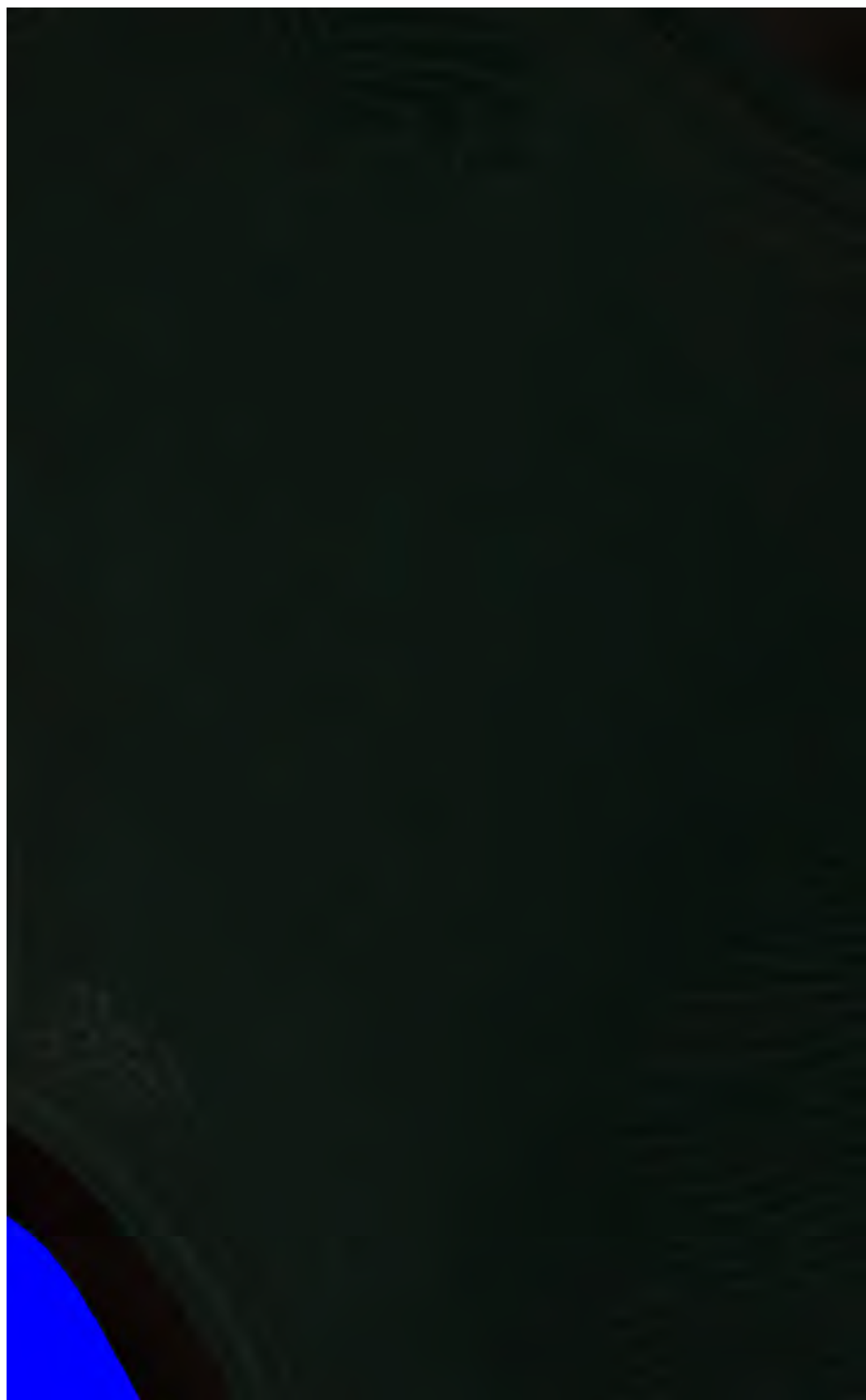
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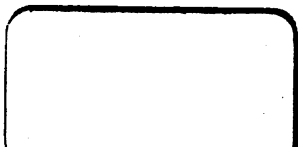
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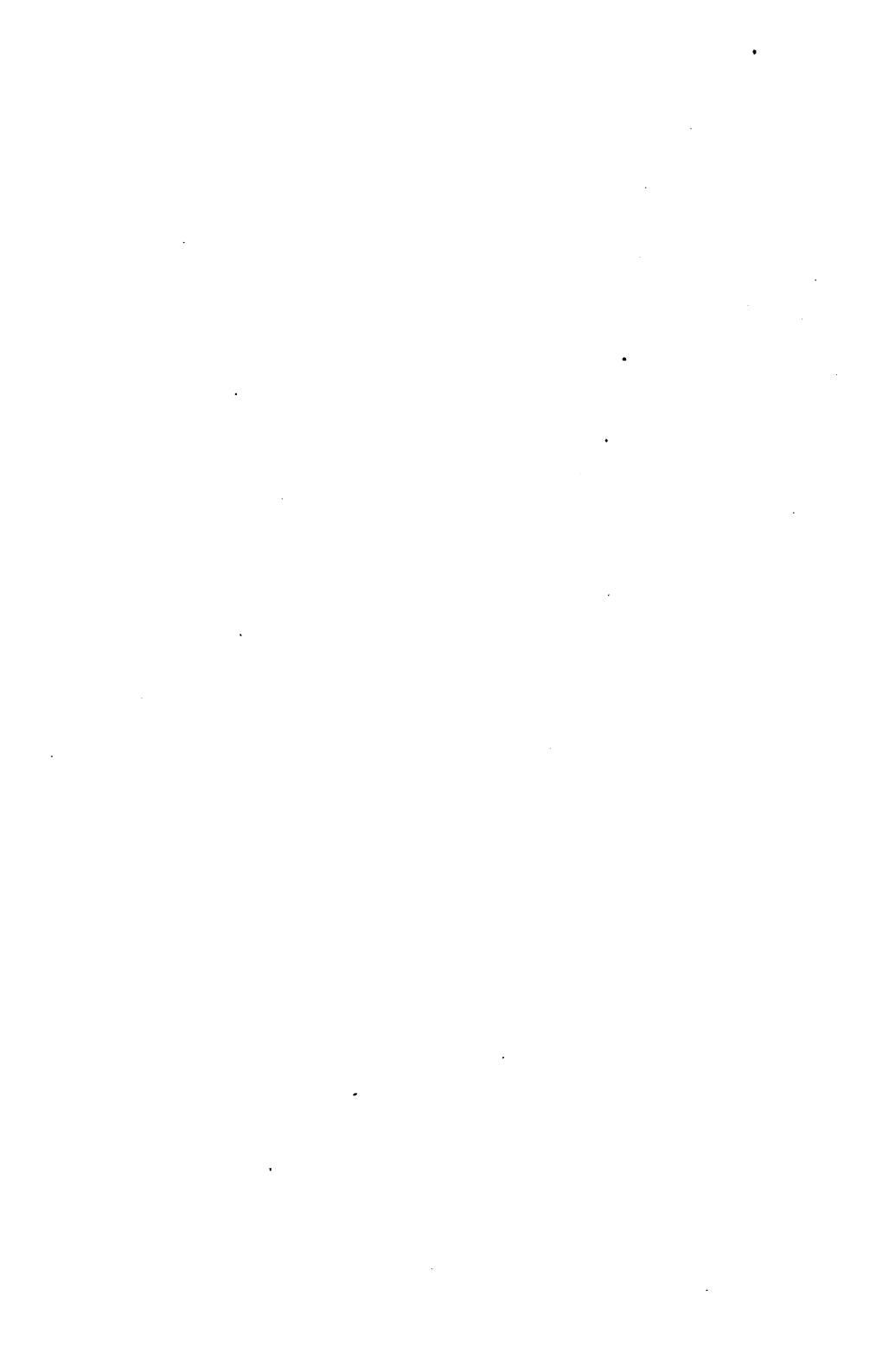
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# HAMPERTON THE FINANCIER.

BY

MORLEY FARROW,

AUTHOR OF "NO EASY TASK."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

*SECOND EDITION.*



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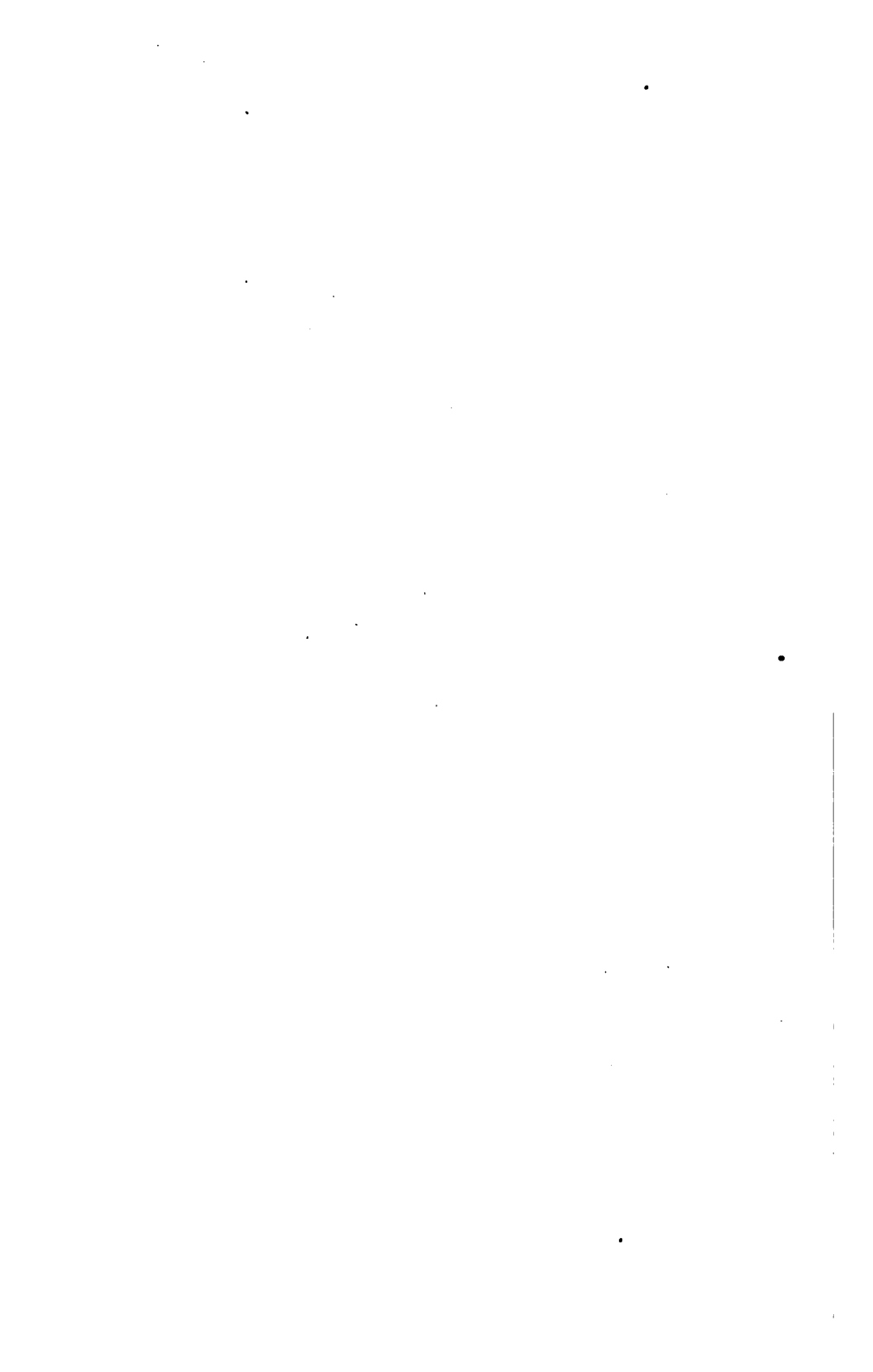
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# HAMPERTON THE FINANCIER.

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## BOOK THE FOURTH.

### THE OLD BATTLE.

*Continued.*

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### AN UNQUIET HEART.

SIBYLLA PROBY had given up all hopes of ever hearing from Robert Evershed. His engagement to Mrs. Prince, a fully recognised matter, now made it a most unlikely thing that he would ever put himself into communication with her. It would not, however, be long before she again saw him. The letters which had lately been received from the Priory referred frequently to the early return of Emily Bryant; and when her pupil left, Sibylla would accompany

her, and she would meet Robert Evershed under the roof of her charge's betrothed. To what would that meeting lead? Would it convince her that Robert had ceased to care for her, in an earnest passion for another? Or would she find that he had only yielded to the fascinations of Olivia Prince as others had yielded? Answer this question in either way she chose, no answer gave her hope.

In the trouble of her heart she determined that she would put an end to her duties in connection with the Bryants as soon as possible. She would face the world once more. In the past had she not felt some latent power, which exercised, might bring her fame and profit? She had little sympathy for the drudgery of a governess's duties. Every faculty in her strong, passionate nature revolted at the work. But there were times when she could not think even so hopefully as she was thinking now—times when she could get no glimpse of a possibility of happiness; times, when, in the agony of her disappointment, she could resolve nothing, and hope nothing. Her love for Robert had

not abated one jot ; it was still the same abiding passion, which had accepted its lot with patience, when, months ago, Robert Evershed had said that he loved her, but was prevented by the nature of his circumstances from making her his wife. It would live in her heart always, though unsatisfied by the delight of possession, and though mocked by the supremacy of another's.

She had just finished her duties, one morning, with her pupil, Emily—duties, which had not been cheered, when that young lady referred now and then to her sister's forthcoming marriage, and her desire to see the gentleman, who was to become her sister's husband—as Miss Graham and Georgine Bryant entered the room.

“Oh, Miss Proby,” said the former lady, “will you be gracious ? I am sure you will be. May we depend upon your services ?”

“In what matter ?”

“The matter of our school treat, which is to take place the day after to-morrow. I want as many young ladies as possible to assist. May we depend upon you ?”

"I am afraid my services will be of little good. I am not used to such things. I always feel myself in the way."

"Now, really—don't say that! Pray, don't! I don't like to have all the responsibility of the affair, and I shall have nearly all. It is true that Miss Legh has been kind enough to promise to assist me as much as she can; but she's a little thing, and is not a person of your experience. Miss Proby!—oh, Miss Proby! you must not be unkind!"

"If my services are needed, I will give them."

"Thanks. Many thanks. Georgine! you will do something. Assist me with an idea. What shall we do to amuse the children?"

"Let them amuse themselves in the best way they can," was Miss Bryant's reply.

"Georgine. How provoking. I wish this school treat to be a successful one. On account of the lateness of the season, most of the games must take place indoors. Some advantage may be derived from this. We shall have no outsiders of both sexes playing that immoral game of 'kissing in the ring.' Oh, I have an idea!"

And this idea trembled in every ribbon of her fashionable bonnet and every fold of her fashionable dress.

"It is this. We will contrive a musical entertainment with our school treat, and Mr. Temple's cantata shall be the chief item in the performance." Having fired off this luminous idea, she awaited breathlessly for the opinions of the bystanders.

"You silly girl," quoth Georgine. "The cantata requires several people to give it due effect; and it will need a good deal of rehearsal. Besides, Mr. Temple is scarcely likely to approve of such a proceeding with a work of his, which has not yet been published."

Lilian Graham's face fell.

"Very well. I have given my idea—you suggest another."

"I have nothing to suggest," said Georgine.

"Miss Proby?"

Miss Proby shook her head, saying:

"I am quite unused to such things; and I regret that I can give you no idea."

"Then Miss Legh must draw out a pro-

gramme of the children's amusements. My suggestions are scouted, and no one else will give me any assistance. Then Miss Lilian dropped into a chair by the table; drew writing materials towards her, and began scrawling a note to Petite—running thus:

“Dearest Miss Legh—Will you have the very great kindness to arrange for the school treat on Thursday, and for the amusements which are to follow it. Innumerable ideas have occurred to me; but they have not suited my friends. Mr. Temple—will he not assist you? We might get him a piano, and he might play. How charming! Or should the piano scheme prove impracticable, there is a concertina belonging to the school-master. Surely Mr. Temple might give the children selections from the Creation, or Don Giovanni, or Judas Macabæus, or Lucia di Lammermoor, or any other popular opera or oratorio? Suggest this to him. Or he might read them an article upon church music. Such a proceeding would be of incalculable benefit to them. But dearest Miss Legh, pray suggest and arrange. The extra re-

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sponsibility, the affair which I now feel, will, unrelieved by you, kill me.

“Ever most sincerely yours,

“LILIAN GRAHAM.”

When this had been despatched to Blanche Legh, the writer thereof exclaimed, with a sigh:

“My mind is a little at rest now!”

“Do you suppose Mr. Temple will think it worth his while to attend your school treat?” asked Georgine, with more meaning than she intended to put into her words.

“Yes; I am sure he will. Such an amiable young man as he will do anything for a lady.”

“He’ll very much relish your suggestion of the concertina,” sneered Miss Bryant. “I can quite fancy his taking his stand upon the platform, bowing to his audience, and then beginning to pull that hideous instrument out and in.”

Sibylla darted a quick look at Georgine, thinking—

“How keenly sensitive she is to seeing Mr. Temple in a ridiculous position; and yet she seems to keep away from him as much as possible.”



"Georgine! you will give me some help," said Lillian.

"What help can I give you? I—I—don't like school treats; they are bores, and I don't think I shall attend this one."

"Not attend! Why? You unkind girl—you most unkind girl. Not attend! Then the awful responsibility of this treat will kill me. I wish I had left it all to the school-master and school-mistress. I shall go distracted."

"If you have any difficulty, I have no doubt that Miss Legh will help you out of it."

"And do you really mean to tell me that you will not give me any assistance, and that you won't attend?"

"What assistance can I give you. As for attending, I think it is highly probable that I shall not!"

Though it was probable that the school treat would not have afforded Miss Bryant any great amount of gratification, her chief motive in declining to grace it with her presence was a strong conviction that Mr. Temple would be there; and the resolution she wished to put

into effect, was to see as little as possible of him. She would best secure her own peace of mind by adopting this course; and she would furthermore not expose herself to the temptation, into which she might fall, if she and Lester saw much of each other. Since the night when she had adopted this resolution, she had adhered to it with very praiseworthy courage. If she were to go, and meet him, her courage might give way; and she might be betrayed into something of which she would have afterwards to repent. Of what account, then, would be the admission of her shortcomings which she had made Blanche Legh, and her profession of a purpose of doing better in the future which had accompanied the confession, if she tried at the outset of this worthier career to steal another's love? She would avoid Mr. Temple as she had hitherto done; and her friend, Miss Graham, must put what construction she chose upon her conduct.

In spite of the very heavy sense of responsibility with regard to this school treat which Miss Graham affected to feel, the chief burthen of superintending the necessary ar-

rangements devolved upon Blanche Legh. A variety of letters passed between the two ladies relative to the matter during the day or two which preceded the affair. Miss Graham had a variety of suggestions all more or less impracticable, which she urged with magniloquence, and only abandoned when she vaguely saw they were not to be carried out. Blanche was very practical in her plans, and these were at first regarded with great disfavour by Miss Graham, and only received her assent when she could not withhold it any longer. Miss Graham confidently relied upon the appearance of Mr. Temple at the entertainment, as a young man who might be useful at all times, and whom she might effectively patronise. He would unquestionably be able to contribute to the amusement of the party, and as one of her circle, and a gentleman about whom the newspapers were writing in laudatory terms, he would reflect some little glory upon herself. Very greatly to her annoyance, she received a short note from Petite, on the morning of the day when the entertainment had to take place, containing this postscript :—

“I am sorry to say that Mr. Temple will be unable to attend, as professional duties require his presence at home. I am requested by him to ask whether you will have the kindness to return to him the MS. of his cantata, as he wishes to get it ready for printing as soon as possible.”

“How tiresome!” exclaimed Miss Graham. “My trouble will be increased tenfold. That young man might have come, and been of some use. As for his music, I shall certainly not take the trouble to return it to-day. If he doesn’t care to oblige me, I shall take no care to oblige him.”

The motive which induced Miss Bryant to absent herself from the schoolroom had a parallel in the motive which induced Mr. Temple to do the same.

He feared she might be there, and stern duty said—“Keep away from her—keep away from the place where she is likely to be.”

Miss Graham, having vainly endeavoured to persuade Georgine to accompany her, set off to the school with Miss Proby, and the younger ladies, without having said anything as to her

disappointment in the matter of Mr. Temple. She went forth in an unsatisfactory temper ; and Georgine, standing at the window, and watching her off, said to herself :

“ It is well that I do not accompany her. For me to see him would do no good.”

To a person in a healthy frame of mind, a school treat is not unlike to be a rather interesting event. To see some sixty or seventy children eating with a gusto which ordinary, well-fed people rarely experience—to watch their faces glowing over plates of plum-pudding, and their eyes brighten over slabs of capitally roasted beef—to watch their joyous abandon in play—surely there are worse sights in the world than this. What, however, one can witness with complacency, when he has no great trouble of his own, to disturb the serenity of a mind ready to derive pleasure from very insignificant objects, one cannot witness, when his heart is bowed down by trouble. It will require stronger excitement than a school treat to disengage a mind from brooding over its griefs. Sibylla

took a part in the school treat with a very slight sense of pleasure. She saw other young ladies quite at home in ministering to the cares of the children ; but she was bored by her duties. The shout of welcome which the children sent up, upon the arrival of Miss Graham and her companions, stunned her ; and Miss Graham's fidgetty command—" Pray do something, Miss Proby ! Pray do something ! Assist, assist !" had no very soothing effect on a mind unstable and unstrung.

Oh, the weary, weary day ! Oh, her weary, weary heart ! The happiness which clothed the children's faces, added only so much the more to her pain. Why were they so carelessly light-hearted ? She could almost hate them for seeming so different to herself. When would the dreary work of eating be over ? When would their greedy appetites be satisfied ? Blanche Legh was deftly useful, tripping here, tripping there, in her ministration to these little ones. Miss Proby's services contributed little to the general benefit. She stood aside as much as possible ; wishing that she had never come,

wishing, at times, that she had never been born.

At last the feed was over. At a sign from the school-mistress, the children arose and sung a hymn by way of grace. Oh, the dissonance of that hackneyed rhyming thanksgiving ! Oh, the misery of its endless repetitions !

The dinner over, and the grace over, certain youths, attired in the ugly habiliments which it is the fashion to clothe the scholars of our Sunday schools, mounted a platform at the end of the room, and commenced a scene. The beauty of virtue, the unsatisfactoriness of vice, the duty of obedience to our superiors, the importance of patience ;—such were the themes upon which four young gentlemen descanted, with the thrilling eloquence of a parrot. This performance over, there was a wonderful clatter of applause, under the cover of which the youths descended from the platform, and their places were occupied by four damsels in very ugly bonnets, and in dresses of a most unrefreshing colour. These young ladies had lofty views upon the duties which especially devolved upon their sex.

To be very modest, very cheerful, very careful, and very content, was the earnest resolve of these young persons, duly assisted by the prompting of the school-mistress. Their virtuous resolution over, they descended from the platform to deafening applause; and then two boys and two girls fronted the audience—all very nervous; and well they might be, for the school-master was waving a baton, as if he purposed giving their heads a preparatory knock by way of stirring up their brains to a high artistic and intellectual pitch. “Hail smiling Morn” was sung, and when the young performers had satisfied themselves by honouring the opening day with appropriately joyful feelings, they expressed a desire of wandering “all amongst the barley”—a proceeding which evidently afforded the audience great gratification, for the applause was both frequent and loud.

“By Jove! Miss Graham, that’s good—that’s uncommonly good! I never heard it better done in London!”

Such was the criticism of a gentleman standing close to Lilian, and close enough to Sibylla to



to be heard by her. Turning towards him, she saw that he was Mr. Somerton.

"And do you really think it good?" said Lilian.

"Indeed I do. First rate!"

"I have taken a great deal of trouble with the children," simpered Lilian. "I am very glad their performances give satisfaction. You are staying in the neighbourhood, Mr. Somerton?"

"Only for a day or two," responded that gentleman.

"You'll call and see papa, won't you? He'll be very glad to see you."

"If I have time, I'll certainly call, Miss Graham."

"Miss Bryant is staying with us, of course you know."

"Yes."

And Mr. Somerton blushed; for was not Miss Bryant sister to the lady, whose treatment of him had not afforded him much pleasure?

Sibylla gave them a passing glance, and did not in her heart wonder that Mrs. Prince re-

garded Robert Evershed as a husband much more to be desired than Arthur, who, by-the-way, seemed to have quite recovered his spirits, and wandered about the schoolroom with Miss Graham, as if he might think of raising her to the position in his affections, which had once been occupied by Olivia.

Mr. Somerton had no further opportunity of applauding the musical talents of the school-children, for their performances were now over, and games were about to succeed. To Sibylla Proby, the recitations and the musical performances had been bad enough, in all conscience ; but the romps, and the noise and the shouting with which they were accompanied, were worse than any of the preceding features. She longed to get away, being out of tune with all the unchecked laughter and joy about her.

In very strong contrast to hers were the thoughts and actions of Petite, and every time Sibylla's eye fell upon the little busy figure—never idle—Sibylla thought of this difference. Petite never saw that these children were, many of them, awkward and ugly : she had no angry

feelings because their appetites seemed unsatisfiable ; the pride they took in their recitations and their music was not contemptible in her eyes. They looked up to her, and loved her, remembering that the kindnesses they had received from her were innumerable, and knowing that they could not take greater interest in themselves than she took.

" You are not enjoying yourself, Miss Proby," said Petite.

" I certainly am not, Miss Legh."

" I am sorry to hear you say that."

" How long will the affair last ?"

" Oh, for some time longer."

" Then I shall not witness much more of it. The noise these children make is stunning. I have been of no use here, and at present I fail to see an opening for any usefulness on my part."

The tone of voice in which this was said hurt her listener.

" You are not happy ?" she said.

" Who told you that ?"

" Miss Proby—I didn't mean to offend you !"

"I dare say not."

"I wish—I wish you would let me do you a kindness!"

"What kindness?" asked Sibylla, quickly.

"That you must name."

"That I cannot name," said Sibylla.

Petite looked up in the face of the dark, handsome girl, and read in her eyes that she wished for no companionship or sympathy from her.

"I wish I could make you happy!"

Sibylla made a slight movement of impatience. Petite passed on. Looking round a few minutes afterwards to the spot where she had been talking with her, Blanche saw that Miss Proby had left it; another glance showed her that she was leaving the school-room.

How glad Sibylla was to get away from the racket! She at once bent her way homewards. Strange to say, she gave no welcome to any excitement which had a tendency to call her mind away from the dull tenour of her morbid fancies. The thousand and one pleasures which women, situated like her, would have seized, by way of

diverting their attention, were passed over by Sibylla. It was only when she was watching Georgine Bryant, and speculating on the probable causes of her conduct, that she felt any relief from her dull sorrow : it was only when she could watch Georgine that she cared to forget her own sad lot. But as she walked homewards, the last person she thought about was Georgine—the last interest she had was the interest of another than herself. If Robert Evershed had known the worth of her love, and its power of endurance, would he have ever become a slave to Olivia Prince's fascinations ? Had he for a moment guessed that her faithfulness to him would have remained unshaken in the face of his falsehood, would he have dishonoured himself by the falsehood ? Heaven only knows ! Man is so weak, even when his most cherished interests are at stake !

It did not take Sibylla Proby long to reach Mr. Graham's. Instead of entering the house by the front door, she entered it by the conservatory, which, according to the modern fashion, opened into the drawing-room. She did not

care much for flowers, but upon this occasion she stopped and looked rather attentively at a myrtle which had struck her by its beauty and fragrance. Suddenly she heard a voice, then another voice. The first was that of Lester Temple; the second was that of Georgine Bryant. The tone of both was a tone of pain; but that of the male speaker had a strangely pleading eloquence.

"Georgine! Georgine! Do you indeed say this?"

It was Lester speaking.

"Yes. Go, and ask me no more."

"I cannot go until you have told me further. You love me?"

"Have I not said I do?"

"Then—then—why do you keep aloof from me?"

"I have told you the reason."

"Will nothing alter your intention?"

"Nothing—nothing. If you had any esteem for me, you would not wish me to alter it."

Sibylla listened, and heard more than this.

Then the door of the drawing-room opened, and Mr. Temple took his departure.

The next moment Miss Proby noiselessly turned and left the conservatory.

## CHAPTER IX.

### CONFLICT AND VICTORY.

AND how came it that Mr. Temple happened to be with Georgine Bryant? He had not intentionally run into mischief; but, as is so often the case, mischief had met him when and where he least expected it.

Miss Graham not having complied with his request of returning him the MS. of his cantata, Lester went to the house for the purpose of obtaining it himself. That nobody would be at home he fully supposed; and the very last person that he expected to see was Georgine. In the various communications which had passed



from Miss Graham to Miss Legh, Lilian had made no allusion to her friend's intention of staying away, hoping to get the better of this intention, before the school treat took place. As I have before said, Mr. Temple refused to attend the entertainment, from a fear that he would there meet Miss Bryant; and now cross purposes and the cantata were bringing the two together, and endangering their very good resolutions.

Lester rapped at the door of the Graham Mansion, and a servant immediately appeared.

"I've come for some music I left here the other night. Has Miss Graham given you any instructions about returning it to me?"

"No, sir."

"Forgot it, most likely."

The footman suggested that Lester shall walk in and find it himself; being very ignorant of the nature of cantatas.

"Thank you. I'll leave Miss Graham a short note explaining what I've done!"

And preceded by the servant, Lester Temple entered the drawing-room. He did not expect

to hear his name announced, believing that nobody was at home.

The astonishment at hearing a sonorous voice announce the name of Mr. Lester Temple, was succeeded by the greater astonishment of this gentleman seeing Georgine Bryant arise to meet him. The door closed, and they were together.

"I expected you were at the school-room," said Lester.

"I don't care for school treats and——" so spoke Miss Bryant. "You have come, perhaps, to see Mr. Graham? But they are all at the school."

"No: I came for my music. Miss Legh wrote Miss Graham a note, asking her to return it. As she had apparently forgot to do so, I came after it."

"Miss Graham will be disappointed because you are not at the school."

"I hope not."

"Perhaps you did not appreciate her suggestion of the concertina," laughed Georgine.

Lester laughed too. But there was evident

constraint between them ; and I think each was guessing the other's feelings.

" Ah ! there's my music," said Lester, his eye falling on the MS. " Perhaps you will explain to Miss Graham what I have done. I hope she won't think me rude." Now, what was Mr. Temple to do ? " Go," whispered prudence and duty. " Stay," whispered his own heart, and, I am sorry to say, he was obedient to the second whisper.

" Do you make a long visit to Haystone, Miss Bryant ?"

" I have been here some time now. I expect papa will soon be writing for me to come back. Particularly as my sister is not unlikely soon to marry !"

" Soon to marry ?" said Lester, in a tone of astonishment. " I never hear from Robert Evershed now. It was with great surprise that I heard of his engagement to your sister !"

" Why ?"

" Because I knew that he had once been greatly attached to Miss Proby ; and when he became a rich man, I quite expected that he would have married her !"

"But he had never been engaged to her—had he?"

"You must excuse my saying so, though it is your own sister he is now going to marry. In my opinion he was engaged to Sibylla Proby, as much as a man can be engaged to a woman." In spite of the very virtuous tone which graced this speech, I apprehend that Mr. Temple was not ignorant of some guilty yieldings to the charm of Georgine Bryant's beauty.

"I did not know that matters had gone so far as you say they went between them," observed Georgine. "Miss Proby is not very communicative; and has never mentioned Mr. Robert Evershed's name to me. As my young sister has recovered her health, I expect she will soon return; and, of course, Miss Proby will accompany her. I trust nothing unpleasant will happen at the Priory, when both Sibylla and Mr. Evershed are under the same roof. And you think he loved Miss Proby?"

"I do, indeed! Knowing, however, what your sister's fascinations are, I don't at all wonder at Robert's fate."

"If Mr. Evershed really cared for Miss Proby, I don't for a moment believe that the fascinations, as you call them, of any woman, would have had any very serious effect upon him. A man's love must be indeed a worthless thing if it can shift from one object to another, just as some fresh attractions in these different objects may be revealed."

Georgine spoke this very earnestly, her face turned away from Lester. As he heard her, his face coloured a little, and he made no immediate reply.

"*Parler d'amour c'est faire l'amour.*"— And Mr. Evershed's affections were gradually leading Mr. Temple and Miss Bryant to think of their own.

"Of course your sister is very happy, Miss Bryant," said Lester, by way of making some remark.

"Olivia, as you know, is always happy. I have not seen her since her engagement; but in her letters to me she always speaks of Mr. Evershed as if she had a very sincere regard for him."

"I should be very sorry to question the sin-

cerity of your sister's regard for him ; but I have a fear, and that fear is, that——”

“I know what you are going to say, Mr. Temple ; that your friend's regard for my sister is less sincere. You know more about him than I do. If what you hint is true, I am very sorry for Olivia.”

“You have not exactly guessed my meaning. My fear is, that he has been charmed by Mrs. Prince's beauty and manner into a forgetfulness of his real regard for another. You know what your sister is. You know how amiable and good-natured she is to everybody, and that more than one person has had reason to blame himself because of having misinterpreted this amiability and good-nature. Isn't it just possible that my friend has made the mistake which others have made, and that, in consequence, he has become blind to his own feelings, as he may have been blind to her meaning ?”

“We are in the region of suppositions, and I hate suppositions ;” and Georgine spoke this with all her old petulancy. “It is natural,” she said the next moment, in a quieter tone,

“that you should have your friend’s interest at heart ; and it is equally natural that I should have my sister’s.”

Georgine was fencing admirably. Her resolution to do her duty was stronger than his. His was shaken ; hers had only trembled.

“You believe your sister is well content with Mr. Evershed ?”

“Yes.”

“Does she know, do you think, that he was once engaged to Emily’s governess ?”

“She knows, of course, that there was once something between them. But she is satisfied. He may love her, even though——”

“He once loved Sibylla Proby ! Do you, indeed, think so ? If he ever gave Sibylla his earnest heart—and this not so very long ago—could he now care at all seriously for another ? Do you not think that he may only have forgotten himself, and forgotten his duty, as thousands do—to wake up and find that he has made a mistake, and that his love for her, to whom he first told it, is as strong as ever ?”

Under such a cover Mr. Temple was putting his own case.

"I don't know—I don't know," said Georgine, nervously.

"But if he has done so," Lester went on; "he is not the first. And if he suffers, he will not be the only one who has suffered."

Then followed silence; Lester broke it by using Miss Bryant's name:—

"Georgine!"

That word made her give him a startled look. The truth was coming out now. All good resolutions, all honest purposes were forgotten: the charmed presence was irresistible in its influence, and Lester's many boasts, made with all the virtue of sincerity, were proving idle.

"I have been speaking of myself, Georgine, as well as of my friend. I have made a mistake—I love you still!"

No answer from her.

"I love you still! Speak. I have been trying hard to keep you from knowing this. I have betrayed myself now. Forgive me speaking thus. I love you. Is it too late for me to say so?"

"Too late," she said, mechanically.

He approached her closer, saying—



"And you, Georgine, cannot you say that you love me, too?"

Oh, for help! The pleading of his voice was becoming too great for her resistance.

"I have not spoken too late, Georgine? You will be mine?"

"Oh! no—no!"

"You cannot deny your love! Why are you silent? What blame there is, I will take. All! You have not sought me. Speak! A word!"

What could she say? Confess the truth, or play a part, as she had hitherto done? Oh, for some interruption to put an end to this struggle! She looked to the window, wishing—though she knew it was foolish—that she might see someone coming to the house. The paths—a few scattered leaves blowing about them—were untrodden by a foot.

"Tell me, Georgine, if I have guessed the truth. If you love me, why are you so silent—so strange? I thought from what Miss Legh had told me" (Lester winced a little as he used this name,) "that you were hoping I should speak again. I thought——"

"It was true what I told Miss Legh," cried Georgine, impulsively. "I told her of the good she had done for me; I told her if I was ever better or more useful in the future than I had been in the past, it would be owing to her influence. You are ungenerous if you think I made this confession with only a selfish object in view. And because she has done me this service, can I mock the sincerity of my intentions by anything which may deprive her of one, whom she loves so dearly as she loves you?"

"But—but—Georgine, you do love me?"

"Must I say yes? Though I admit this, however, I will be true to myself—I will be true to her. Help me—oh, help me to be this!"

"Georgine!"

"She loves you most dearly; and, seeing what she has done for me, I dare not cause her pain. For this reason I have kept away from you. I have struggled hard to do what was right. Do not make it harder."

"And you, Georgine, can you make this sacrifice?" cried Lester, with admiration.

"Knowing what I was, you may well ask this question. Yes ; I will make it !"

"Will nothing shake your resolution?"

"Nothing. Oh, go, and leave me ! Go to Blanche Legh, whose love for you might make any man proud ! In her companionship you will forget that you ever cared for me."

"I shall never forget that I have cared for you. Nor would you wish me. Am I to go?"

"Yes," she answered, painfully.

"Without another word ? Without a kindly look from you ?"

He approached her closer, and took her hand.

"Will nothing alter your intention, I ask you again ?"

"Nothing ! Nothing ! If you have any esteem for me besides love, you would not wish me to alter it."

"Then, good-bye ! You are better and truer than I am, Georgine. I shall always love you—I shall always love you !" Again and again he pleaded, with urgency and passion, repeating with slight variation his former appeals.

He tried to draw Georgine towards him—she

resisting. But the kiss he gave her did not move her resolution. In a few moments he was gone. The victory was Georgine's. Sitting in deep thought by the fire, she little guessed that the end of her interview with Mr. Temple had had a witness in that young lady, whose story had led to Lester's talking of his own, and was, perhaps, in some measure answerable for what had followed.

## CHAPTER X.

### PETITE AND SIBYLLA.

Two or three days passed. Georgine did very little during this period—not that idleness on her part was at all wonderful; but in these three days she did even less than usual. A box from Mudie's arrived containing a large number of volumes—novels, of course, all, to use a canting, but apparently popular expression, “sensational.” She had made exciting romances her chief literary food; but she found now, or seemed to find, her old friends unsatisfactory companions. Beautiful ladies, always conspicuous for singularly thick and luxuriant hair, ran

away in vain from their doting husbands, and consoled themselves by the attentions of men whose relationship with them society looks upon with no favouring eye. Our old, old friend, the conscious bigamist, told her thrilling history, without any very cheering effects upon Miss Bryant. The ostracised man, dwelling in a house remote from the houses of ordinary mortals, and enjoying a character for having committed himself in a very deplorable manner in his young days, and for a singular knack in winning the affections of young ladies of only half his age, did not prevent Miss Bryant from thinking that there was more painful romance in the world than that recorded in three volume novels. Mysterious parents—awful secrets—unexpected discoveries—horrors upon horrors accumulated failed to give Georgine much pleasure. Volume after volume was tossed aside with consummate indifference.

“How I wish people would write something fresh,” she said more than once during these two or three days.

This time to Sibylla Proby bore a painful

resemblance to all the time she had known for months. Educational duties with her pupil, were succeeded by a walk. This, seldom a very inspiring one, was succeeded by luncheon, which was followed by further duties. Then there was leisure—then there was dinner. After that her time was her own. If she endeavoured to enliven it by any hopes of a brighter future, the recoil after the stimulus of fancy was all the more painful. If Georgine Bryant was weary of her novels, Sibylla Proby was more weary of her life.

Not so, Miss Graham. For her, during these few days, life had dressed itself in wonderfully rain-bowed hues. She saw a great deal of Mr. Somerton, whose appearance in the county of Hertford was attributable to his having received a pressing invitation from an old school-fellow to go there and hunt. If so aristocratic a young lady as Miss Graham could have perpetrated the weakness of falling in love, upon such a comparatively short acquaintance, I should say that she had. Mr. Somerton's feelings were not perhaps very deep. He had raved very incoherently for some months about Mrs. Prince ;

and overcome by Miss Graham—"a marvelously aristocratic girl, by Jove"—he was prepared to rave about her in a precisely similar fashion. Owing to some extraordinary caprice, Lillian Graham took it into her head that he was a young gentleman of great intellectual sympathy. She had no sooner formed this idea than she proceeded to go to work upon it, and rattled away on any subject more or less removed from the every day, and common-place. And as she had done a little in ologies during her time, she was very soon able to bewilder her astonished admirer. To exchange ideas with her upon the various subjects touched upon by her fluent tongue, was an impossibility for Mr. Somerton. After her longest burst of eloquence, he would exclaim "Good Heavens!" by way of comment; and forthwith she would mount again, her astonished listener vainly endeavouring to comprehend her meaning.

"The nebular hypothesis, Mr. Somerton," she exclaimed, with intellectual fervour, "does it strike you as being a scientific consistency, which ultimate discoveries in astronomy will verify, or



as an ingenious speculation of minds, more imaginative than rational? I confess that I am puzzled when I contemplate the subject. There are times, I admit, when its clearness seem inevitable; and there are times again, when I revolt against the system. Well—such a theory must be left to time—and time, the great unriddler, will unriddle it!”

“Good Heavens!” said Mr. Somerton, under breath, who until this moment had never heard of the nebular hypothesis, or indeed of any other hypothesis.

“What a science is astronomy!” Miss Graham went on again, followed by Somerton, mentally panting. “What a science is astronomy! How it elevates the mind—how it enlarges one’s views of the finite and the infinite. How trivial the petty annoyances of the world seem to one whose thoughts are devoted to the movements of the starry spheres. Ah! Mr. Somerton, what is your view of Comte’s Classification of the Sciences?”

“I think,” he answered, in utter consternation —“I think—”

“It is marvellously ingenious—the work of a mind, singularly original and profound!” (Mr. Somerton, breathing relief again, says mentally, “Great Powers,” as his companion rattles on). “I so consider it. The laws of astronomy developing into physics—physics into chemistry—chemistry into physiology—and physiology into social science! Ah—what a classification! When I fully comprehended his meaning, I felt that my eyes were opened upon a new world. And his philosophy of man’s view of life—is it not marvellous? How lucid!—Man, in the earlier stages of his history, regarding all phenomena in a theological light, in the second, a metaphysical, and in the third, arriving at a positive conception of the working of phenomena! How grand! How comprehensive! I am aware, Mr. Somerton, that his views are not in favour with the religious world—but whether they are correct, or not, they are wonderful—are they not?”

“Yes—by Jove,” from Mr. Somerton; surprise growing upon surprise.

“Is physiology one of your favourite studies, Mr. Somerton?”

"Y—e—s—I may say yes!" Not that the gentleman for a moment knew what this was.

"So it is of mine!" exclaimed Miss Graham rapturously. "What can be more gratifying than the knowing the laws of one's nature. I am sorry to say that there is a prejudice against ladies making physiology a study! I should like to know why; I should particularly like to know why. Ladies have systems as well as men—why should they not understand the working of those systems? Have you any objection, Mr. Somerton, to a lady's knowing the composition of bile, or the effect of the gastric juice?"

"Oh, dear me, no," said that gentleman, in a rather frightened tone. Carried on by her scientific enthusiasm, Miss Graham was showing symptoms of forgetting that her hearer was not one of her own sex.

"I have always maintained, Mr. Somerton, and maintained this in spite of obdurate prejudice and consummate ignorance, that women should be familiarised in a much greater degree than is common with the arcana of nature. As the mothers of succeeding gene-

rations, they should surely not be ignorant of what may naturally effect the qualities of these generations; they owe it to their sex, they owe it to their children, and their children's children."

"Good heavens!" Mr. Somerton's previous exclamations had expressed the astoinshment of an admiring man: this expressed something else; and Miss Graham came by degrees dimly to perceive that the ground she was treading on was getting singular. The enunciation of her various intellectual opinions she brought to a conclusion thus:—

"I am glad that your views are mine: that there is so great a *rapport* between our mental sympathies."

When Mr. Somerton left Miss Graham, his mind was in an unusually bewildered condition. Vainly he attempted to clear it by a series of expressive exclamations.

"She's a wonder, she is!" he said again and again. "What a brain she must have! what a brain! and yet she's aristocratic—devilishly aristocratic!"

So Mr. Somerton and Miss Graham, under very singular influences, came to fancy that they liked each other. Cupid wings his arrows with strange accompaniments, but I never knew him bring a victim down, and this no wise one, by a shaft fledged with Comte's Philosophy of the Sciences and the delights of Physiology, before.

Quite ignorant of Georgine's trouble, of Sibylla's Proby's discovery, of Miss Graham's romance of science and love, Blanche Legh passed the time after her usual fashion. Lester Temple was rather moody during these two or three days, and affected to be pressed by professional work. Mrs. Temple saw that something was amiss, but forbore to urge her suspicions on her son, hoping that he would regain his easiness of temper in time. He scarcely ever went out. He had to make a fair copy of some newly-composed music, or he had some new ideas which he wished to try on the piano, or he was anxious to study orchestration. A musical critic had ventured to hint that his

orchestration was susceptible of improvement, and being of an ambitious temperament, he was resolved to give it all the improvement he could ; —so he said to Petite, when she hinted that she would like him to go out for a walk with her. Trusting him implicitly in all things, she never for a moment called in question his desire to render himself more perfect in some department of the art. But when she went out unaccompanied by him, I am sorry to say that his fair copy of music made but small progress, and that his new ideas seemed very scanty. His hand, laying aside the pen for a few minutes, wandered carelessly over the keys, perhaps endeavouring ineffectually to evoke some thrilling chords. Then he would get up, walk impatiently around the room, and behave as though his mind was ill at ease, and there was no remedy to afford it relief. As for his intentions of improving himself in orchestration, such intentions only went and joined those of many others. I dare say he was very foolish ; I dare say he was even something worse than foolish. But in spite of all that Georgine Bryant had said to him, and in spite

of his most earnest belief that she would act as she had proposed, he could not forget that he had loved her; he could not blind himself to the fact that he loved her now more than ever. If he had loved her when she was vain, idle, self-indulgent, and thoughtless, could he do otherwise now that she had admitted the purposelessness of her past life, lamenting it, and resolving that her future should be better and truer.

It was the third day—a very dull one—after Lester Temple's interview with Georgine Bryant. Autumn, not that of September, bright and golden, but the murky autumn of closing October was stripping the leaves off the trees with vicious quickness, significant of coming winter. Lester Temple, not in the best of spirits, was sitting at the window, and in the intervals of thinking that his lot in life was not so satisfactory as he could desire it to be, was confounding the weather and the sky for looking so nasty. His mother was not far from his side, engaged with her needle, in that placid, contented fashion so common to middle-aged ladies. Blanche was with them,

just completing a pair of embroidered slippers, which were for the use of the exacting gentleman, who was looking so moodily at the sky. At last she put her embroidery away, walked to the window, and looked out.

"Will it rain, do you think, Lester?"

"Yes. I never saw such miserable weather in my life."

"But you don't think it will rain yet for an hour or two, do you, for I want to go out."

"Go out?" said Mrs. Temple.

"Yes; there are two or three people I wish to see. I will take the opportunity when it is a little fine."

"Don't go out this afternoon, Petite," said Mrs. Temple; "you will get wet through."

"I must. As for getting a little wet, I don't care anything for that."

"I suppose you are going to see some of your old women?" said Lester.

"Yes, some of my old women, as you call them. But I won't trouble you to accompany



me, as I know you don't care to hear them talk and to see them take snuff."

"I really can't say that I am particularly edified by their conversation; and I am sorry to confess that I do not regard the spectacle of snuff-taking with the complacency that I should an ordinary artistic exhibition."

Petite laughed, and ran out of the room, appearing, in a few minutes, dressed for her excursion. In only those few minutes the sky had become more ominous, and the promise of coming rain greater.

"You will get wet, Petite," said Mrs. Temple; "I wish you would not go out. It is foolish of you in the face of the weather."

Lester had no mind just then for turning out. Blanche went away, never guessing that his objection to accompany her on her walk had any other motive than the justifiable objection to old ladies, who solaced their lonely hours with snuff, and whose conversation, drearily long, when Blanche was their listener (for her patience was

inexhaustible), was at no time edifying. She was destined to return with completer knowledge.

She had not left her home long before some drops of rain began to fall, and in five minutes there was a pelting shower. She had to walk some little distance, and by the time she arrived at her first house of call, she was wet. To sit talking here to an old lady who was deaf, and curious to know everything that was going on in Haystone, and then having dried herself a little at the fire to go out again while it was still raining, was not a pleasant duty; but Blanche went cheerfully on, caring little for the rain, and still less fearing any after consequences. She called at several houses, in some of which were bed-ridden old women, in others sickly children or ailing men. . Wherever she went she was welcome. When the cottages were warmed by any fires surrounded by ruddy urchins, there was a rapid movement to allow her to approach and share in the pleasantness of light and heat. As she called at her last cottage and was about to return, the shower suddenly held up. The

cessation from rain only caused her to feel that her clothes were unpleasantly damp, and she in consequence hurried quickly home. Passing through Haystone street, she came upon Sibylla Proby, walking in the same direction as herself.

"Miss Legh ! and are you courageous enough to face this inclement weather ?"

"Yes ; I have been to see some of my old friends. I had promised to call on them to-day, and didn't like to break my promise."

"Commendable, this spirit," thought Miss Proby, saying aloud :

"I dare say if you catch a severe cold, these same old friends of yours won't have very much sympathy for you and your ailments."

"You don't seem to have a very high opinion of your neighbours' worth, Miss Proby."

"I ? No. I certainly have not. I am sorry to say it has never been my lot to have much personal experience of innate human goodness. The consequence is that I doubt its existence, save in infinitesimal quantities."

"How bitter you are."

"You may be even more bitter than I one day."

"Never!"

"You hope not, of course. I was not always misanthropical. Indeed, my friends (not that I had many of them) used to say that I took a too lenient view of life. Since this opinion was pronounced, I have seen reason to alter my view. Don't, therefore, be so emphatic in your denial that you may never be as bitter as I am."

"Oh, Miss Proby; you are such a puzzle to me!"

With something very much like a sneer, Sibylla said:

"Indeed, a puzzle! but perhaps not more than I am to myself."

For a few minutes the two walked on together without speaking. Miss Proby broke the silence.

"Go where I will, I hear you well spoken of. Miss Graham—though I believe she is covetous of intellectual distinction (why, I know not, for she is really a great silly)—Miss Graham, I say,

is envious of your reputation. Your kindness, your amiability have won for you a good name everywhere. Before I found out by personal experience the bitterness of trouble, I used to wonder that people could complain of their lot, or be otherwise than useful and good. Trouble came, like an angry storm ; and then I did not wonder that they complained and rebelled. If trouble should ever come to you, do you think that you would be able to do your duty, or what you are pleased to call your duty, so complacently as you have done it this horrible day ?”

Blanche looked into Miss Proby’s face, with a half painful, half puzzled look, but did not answer.

Sibylla went on.

“ I can pity you, Miss Legh ; I can pity you from the bottom of my heart. You are like the person I used to be, trusting in the happiness of the present, and believing the future will resemble it. I can pity you, Miss Legh—more than I can pity myself !”

“ I do not understand you.”

“ Would you wish ?” — (then speaking to

herself rather than to her companion) —  
 “Would it be best that you should understand me?”

“Miss Proby—what do you mean? you are speaking in enigmas.”

For as yet not a shadow of the truth had fallen upon Petite’s mind.

“You are very happy and very full of trust, Miss Legh,” said Sibylla; “but you will have occasion to be unhappy and distrustful, so sure as you are a woman.”

“To be distrustful—of what—of whom?”

“Of what you most hope in; of him whom you most love.”

“Miss Proby; you are most unhappy yourself; you wish to make others so. Because Mr. Evershed deceived you (I know the story) and destroyed your peace, you wish to insinuate that mine may be destroyed. You will not frighten me, Miss Proby. I am sorry that you tried; for I wished to like you, and to do something which might make you happier than you seemed to be. I am very, very sorry that you have not as good reason as I have got to be cheerful and con-

tented, and that" (hesitating) "one you loved ——"

"One I loved," interrupted Sibylla. "Well ! What of one I loved——"

"Has been false to you !"

"If he has been false to me," said Sibylla, with heightened voice, "he has not been false to me than his friend has been to you."

"This is a cruel untruth."

"It is not an untruth," was Sibylla's cool answer ; "and as for its cruelty——"

"It is an untruth," cried Blanche again.

"You will not say so when I tell you all that I know."

Sibylla turned quickly round upon Petite—her face lighted up with strange passion. There was something in this face that frightened Blanche.

"Your courage is ebbing, I see. Months ago had anyone said what would happen, I would have told him to his face that he lied. I was as trusting then as you are now, as sure that he who said he loved me would love me always, as you are sure that he who said he

loved you · but yesterday loves you now. Though I might believe that circumstances would prevent Robert Evershed's ever marrying me, I never—never—never believed that he would become false! What was my trust worth? Oh, my God! what was it worth? He is to be married to the sister of the girl by teaching whom I gain my livelihood. And he did love me! The memory of no other face stood between me and his heart! And if he has ceased to care for me, there was a time when nobody had a thought from him but me. But as for Mr. Temple——”

“No. No. No,” pleaded Blanche, frightened by Sibylla's impetuosity; “do not say that he is false to me. Do not—do not. For heaven's sake, do not.”

Both had stopped—unknowingly stopped: the one speaking with passionate eagerness, the other listening with silent anguish.

“But he is false,” cried Sibylla; “falsely than Robert Evershed ever was!” And strange to say, the knowing that Robert's friend was less true than he, in that Lester Temple had never



really loved Petite, gave the angry girl now speaking some grain of happiness—if such a holy word is to be applied to the feeling which was uppermost in her heart.

“Robert Evershed loved me truly. I know this! For if a man can deceive you by his feigned loving, he cannot deceive me. Fanatically resolved upon achieving some purpose in connexion with his family fortunes, and ready to sacrifice much in the attainment of this object—even his love (for he had the folly or the wisdom—I know not which to call it—to tell so much to me) I was certain that his regard for me was that of a man’s life. He has only yielded to Mrs. Prince’s fascination, as I am told others have done. That he will marry her, I doubt not. It is too late to hope otherwise; but Lester Temple never loved you—never.”

“You are mad.”

“I thank you for the compliment, Miss Legh, and I excuse it. Believe me, or not, as you like. It is no concern of mine, which ever way you choose to act. I can only repeat that he never loved you.”

"You bewilder me ! Speak—speak more fully," cried Blanche, upon whom the manner and the words of her companion were having effect.

"Robert Evershed," replied Sibylla slowly, "has chosen to forget me for Olivia Prince. Lester Temple loved Georgine Bryant, her sister, before he said that he loved you ; and only a day or two ago I was a witness to what assured me that he loves her still !"

"This can't be true ! Oh, Miss Proby, this can't be true !"

Sibylla made a sign of impatience. The rain began falling again ; but the two passionate women stood still unheeding it.

"You were a witness to what assured you that he loves her still ?"

"Yes. I saw them together. You remember the day at the school. Miss Bryant did not attend, expecting to meet Mr. Temple there, and wishing to avoid him. He too did not go. On that afternoon the two met, in Mr. Graham's drawing-room. I returned early from the school-room ; and unseen, I accidentally heard enough

pass between them to convince me that Lester Temple loved Georgine, and was eager to make her his wife. She, in some sense of duty, was stronger than he was. I have told you the truth. Do you not wish that I had not spoken?"

Blanche was silent, breathing heavily.

"Before I made this discovery," Sibylla went on, "I suspected from their manner of intercourse, and from other things which fell under my observation, that there had been more between them than the world knew. My suspicions were confirmed when I heard Lester and Georgine speaking, and if this was not enough to convince me that they both loved each other, the kiss with which they parted left no doubt of it!"

A ghastly pallor had spread over Petite's face : her eyes were fixed on Sibylla : but she said not a word.

"Do you believe me now?"

"Yes." The deathliness and hollowness of the sound of this word made it seem as though it was spoken from a coffin.

"You wished me to speak the truth, and I have spoken it."

"I know you have."

"What—what shall you do?" asked Sibylla curiously.

"What shall I do?" mechanically repeated Blanche. "Tell Lester that I know all. Release him from his vow to me. As he does not love me, I have no claim on him; and I cannot be his wife!"

"You will do this?"

"What can I do otherwise?" The stony, haggard paleness of her face was awful. But more awful were her eyes unmoistened by a tear.

In passing through Mrs. Temple's house to her bedroom, she saw nobody. The only sound besides her own footfall, and the rustling of her damp dress, was the sound of the piano, which Lester was playing. When she reached her bedroom she felt very cold: her wet dress clung to her: and she shivered. Happening by accident to glance at the looking-glass, she started. Was that her face—that pale, awful thing that stared at her like the countenance of a dead person? She sat down on her bed as she was,

without removing a thread. Though she said that she should give Lester Temple up, had she the power to do so? In her heart the old battle was fought, which had been fought in Georgine's, and in Lester's—the old battle, fought every day in some heart, all over the wide, wide world.

“I will tell him what I know; and I will release him,” she murmured at last. But how cold she seemed, chill succeeding chill. Getting up from her seat, she began to change her clothes. As she was doing this, Mrs. Temple came and rapped at the door of her room.

“Are you home, Petite?” asked Mrs. Temple in a gentle voice.

“Yes, Mamma.”

“I never heard you come in.” And she entered—to start, when she saw the face of Blanche. “What—what is amiss?”

“Nothing—nothing. Only I have got wet, and am cold.”

“My dear child”—and Mrs. Temple hurried alarmed to her side. “Something has happened. I am sure of it, by your face.”

Petite shuddered, gave an appealing look at Mrs. Temple, and then fell forward on her breast.

“Why, Blanche—Blanche,” she cried with terror, “you are as cold as death!”

END OF THE FOURTH BOOK.

BOOK THE FIFTH  
"THE MASTER PASSION."

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CHAPTER I.

EGERTON CROSSLEY'S CARE.

IN a room of a house in the Bloomsbury district of London, were two men ; the one lay in bed ill, the other sat by the bed-side reading. One was George Hamperton, the other was Egerton Crossley. As the latter read, the light faded more and more, and at last he laid aside his book saying :—

"This dull November day seems coming to an end ; and I can read no further."

"Thank you—thank you very much for what you have done. I feel that you have done me good."

"I am glad to hear you say so."

"Who would have thought I should ever come to this? I suppose, however, all is for the best, all for the best."

"Not a doubt of it. If we could only believe this at all times, we should accept the crosses of our life with more contentment. But it has often seemed hard for me to realise this, when I have met with disappointment; and I have met with many very heavy ones."

"I dare say," said George Hamperton. "And yet when you look about you on the different lots of different people, how unequal they seem. It is hard to believe that some have not a good deal more happiness than others. And it is when a man thinks his lot is unfair, compared with that of others, and meets disappointments in all his hopes, that he feels he must give himself up, and drift, and drift anywhere."

James Hamperton had procured his brother lodgings in the house of one of his clerks—within a comfortable distance of his own—and on his way to his place of business, in Lin-



coln's Inn; it stood in a quiet street, and Mr. Hamperton's goings and comings were pretty generally unobserved. His brother's position was a precarious one. He possessed a terrible secret; and his own safety depended upon this secret being preserved. He had not been many days in his lodgings before his complaint returned; and he was obliged to keep his bed. Egerton Crossley, who visited him daily, and had had wide experience in illness, saw enough in the symptoms of George Hamperton's illness to assure him that his time in this world would be very short. James Hamperton insisted on Crossley's observancy of secrecy as to his visits to his brother; and without telling him the confession which his brother had made in the White Hart Parlour, at St. Belcham's, told him enough to enable him to understand that his position was dangerous indeed. In all the conditions imposed, Egerton Crossley acquiesced. Wishing to restore peace to a harassed mind, and to give comfort to a soul, which was looking forward with despair to its future here, and its future hereafter, Crossley

was willing enough to keep the matter of his visits a secret; and to promise that he would never breathe George Hamperton's name.

The task he had assumed was no new one. He had comforted many a death bed; he had listened to the last words of faltering lips which spoke of peace and hope as coming at last; he had cheered hearts, broken by sorrow; he had compassionated the miseries of the most depraved; and many a man would have come to his grave despairing had it not been for the brightening presence of Egerton Crossley at his dying bed side.

His military life had chiefly been spent in India, whence he had now returned, with a long leave of absence. His interest in the railway navvies at St. Belcham's had brought him and George Hamperton together; his interest in George Hamperton's welfare kept them together now.

"No lights!" said the voice of a person entering the room. "Where are the lucifers? I've a letter or two to read and write, George, and I am going to do it here." The speaker

was James Hamperton, and he had called in, on his way home from his office. He struck a light and advanced to the bed.

"Well, Major, and how is your patient—better? I fancy he seems a little improved. It's kind, it is uncommonly kind of you to come and read to him as I see you have been doing. 'Ministering to a mind diseased' was never one of my capabilities. Well, George, what have you to say for yourself?"

"That I feel a little better."

"That's well—that's well" (turning to the Major). "You are not watched, are you?"

"Watched? No!"

"Hem! Then I rather fear that I am!"

"Watched," said George, in a tone of alarm.

"Yes; though I don't suppose it matters much. My wife is a marvellously inquisitive woman, and she has a mother who makes her more so. As I have left my home in the morning, earlier than usual, and returned later at night—though, to be sure, Heaven knows my movements are uncertain enough!—I rather fear my wife—valuable woman that she is—has be-

come suspicious of my doings. Now, she's the last person I should wish to know of your return : for the very fact that she has this same worrying mother. If this woman knew about it, the matter would blaze about quickly enough : and that mustn't happen. If I am right in my suspicion, it is well that I am going into the country for a day or two. By that time, my wife may forget to watch me. I never caught her at the trick before; but yesterday, if I am not wonderfully mistaken, I had a glimpse of one of my servants—I'm glad she's an ugly one; for I can't bear to have a bad opinion of a pretty girl—in this very street. But don't be alarmed. Nothing very serious will come of it—I'll see."

Mr. Hamperton walked to a table, and seated himself at its side, taking out some papers and letters from his pocket at the same time. "Business—business, Major Crossley," he said ; "I am never emancipated from it. The first thing in the morning—the last thing at night."

"Your profession engages a great deal of your time."

"It does, indeed." Then Mr. Hamperton plunged into his letters; and his brother renewed the thread of his former conversation with Crossley.

"And have you suffered from severe disappointments—disappointments which take all the heart out of one—which cloud every prospect—which make life a burthen?"

"I have suffered very, very bitterly; for I have loved!" said Crossley, slowly.

James Hamperton glanced up from his papers towards the speaker, seemed to reflect, and then bent over them again.

"You have loved," repeated George. "So have I. Oh, how passionately—how earnestly! My love was my life. Losing that, I lost all, and became—became—worse than you think I am. Worse—far worse! But," he added, "when—I don't wish to be rudely anxious—she, whom you loved, became false——"

"She never became false. If she had died—if she had become false—I do not think that my disappointment could have been greater than it is. She is lost to me, in so far that I

do not know where she is, and have the bitter doubt of not knowing whether she be alive or dead. I am tortured by doubt; and doubt is ever more horrible than despair. If I knew that she were dead—if I knew that she were married—I might be contented; but knowing neither, you may guess what I have to suffer.”

“Your story must be a strange one!”

“Not so very strange. I met her in Bombay. When I first knew her she was married—she was the wife of my friend. He died. Then I knew that I loved her. We were to be married. Duties called me up the country. I was wounded in an engagement, and lay for weeks between life and death. When at last I returned to the place where she was living, I found that she had returned to England, a report having reached her that I was dead. Those to whom I applied could give me no information as to the part of England where she lived, or of the name of her friends. She had fully believed the report of my death, and it is quite possible that she may be married now. I know not whether I ought to wish to meet her again, though I

love her now as much as ever—though I shall love her as long as I live !”

Though affecting to read his letters very attentively, Mr. Hamperton was in reality listening with open ears to what Major Crossley was telling his brother. When he first saw Major Crossley in the school-room at St. Belcham's, he knew in a moment that this was the man whom Olivia Prince had so much loved, this was the man, for whom she was about to change the whole tenour of her life, when the rumour of his death reached her, and caused her to return to England, the worldly Olivia of former days. But though he had no suspicions as to the identity of the Major, he had no means of knowing whether he retained her image in his memory as tenderly as she retained his. James Hamperton looked at Egerton Crossley, and looked at a letter in his hand. This letter was signed by Mr. Bryant. The earlier portions referred to matters of a business nature ; but towards the end of it there occurred this sentence :

“ My daughter, Mrs. Prince, will very shortly

marry Robert Evershed. I don't know that she could have selected a husband whom I can approve of more than I can of the one in question. I am not a very ambitious man, but it is gratifying for me to know that Olivia's husband belongs to one of the oldest of our respectable county families, and has come in for the greatest share of my old friend, George Dampier Kealwin's property. I believe Olivia likes him very much. Though she has been something of a flirt in her time, she will make him, I know, a very excellent wife."

James Hamperton read this paragraph again and again. What was he to do? Accidentally he had become possessed of Mrs. Prince's secret; accidentally he had become possessed of Major Crossley's. Should he perform the part of a *Deus ex Machiná*; astound the Major by informing him that he had in his hands a letter from the father of the lady whose memory Crossley cherished so tenderly; carry the Major down into the country; introduce him to Mrs. Prince, and confound Robert Evershed's matrimonial hopes? Mr. Hamperton was not able to answer



these questions at once ; so he turned to his papers again, and began writing.

One of his letters was addressed to Mr. Bryant, Messingham Priory, and it ran thus :—" I will be down at yours to-morrow to talk over our business. We have been very busy in the share market lately, and those who were wise enough to speculate a few months ago, are reaping a golden harvest. I trust you will meet with the same luck. Present my hearty congratulations to Mrs. Prince. Yours, James Hamperton." .

" Yes," thought he, " I had better not interfere. It is too late. I mustn't make Evershed an enemy, and I possibly shall if I part him and Mrs. Prince. As a rich man, something may be made out of him. James Hamperton, at your age, you should think twice before putting your finger into other people's matrimonial pies !"

Egerton Crossley sat with George Hamperton some time, giving him the best consolation in his power. It was long before the sick man became reconciled to his destiny. There were times when he was still rebellious, though they

occurred less frequently than when Egerton Crossley first knew him. His lot had indeed been a hard one. "Men guess and grope ; God sees and knows ;" but he who believes most earnestly cannot but see that there are many lives that would have been useful and noble, but for being thwarted in one supreme hope—but for the failure of one cherished desire ; that many a career which has ended in the storm and darkness of despair, might have culminated in the calm brightness of hope, had some kind influence rained upon it at its commencement ; that perhaps the most abandoned might have known no shame, had one word of hope been whispered. Crossley sadly confessed,—for circumstances again and again forced this truth on him,—that such experiences were not uncommon. Confessing so much, however, he warned George Hamperton against the sin of attempting to justify what he had done, and of denouncing the justice of his lot. Crossley could be engaged upon nothing which touched his most earnest feelings more deeply than his present work. He had no worldly ambition to gratify ; for he had already

found that the satisfaction of mundane hopes was always an uncertainty. It was strange indeed that this pious man when he loved should select so worldly a woman as Olivia Prince. But she had been the one great hope of his life ; and lost to him, life seemed very empty and purposeless, save when he was engaged, as he was engaged now with George Hamperton. To give courage to the faint and weary, hope to the despairing, consolation to the dying—such was Egerton Crossley's happiest work.

James Hamperton read his letters, and answered them. Then he arose from the table, and advanced towards his brother's bed.

"I dare say you think I am a very unsociable fellow," he said ; "but business is, I am sorry to say, paramount to sentiment." (Looking at his watch). "I must be off. If I don't post my letters soon, it will be too late."

Egerton Crossley arose from his seat. "I will look in upon you to-morrow," he said to George Hamperton.

The sick man murmured his thanks.

"My dear George," said Hamperton, with

very sincere affection to his brother : his manner of speaking contrasting oddly with his usual half bombastic, half sentimental method—"I am sorry that I shall be unable to see you to-morrow morning, as I am going out of town. My absence from London, however, will not be a long one ; and I shall very probably be home the day after. So don't be uneasy. You are quite comfortable here?"

"Quite."

"That's good. I can rely upon the people in the house. And if I am watched, as it is quite possible I may be, I am only watched because it is thought that there is just some possibility that I may have an acquaintance that a married man ought not to have. Ah—Major Crossley, from a few words you dropped to my brother, I conjecture that you are unmarried. Marriage is a grand institution ; but if it is your fortune to have a jealous wife, not a violently jealous wife, but a quietly jealous one,—and these are by many degrees the worst,—you will wish a good many times in the course of the year that you had remained celibate. I adore

my wife: no man can adore his wife more fervently than I do; but there are times when I wish—well, I will not say what, because it would reflect prejudicially upon my adorable Jane. She has the patience of an angel—the benevolence of a saint; but there are moments when her eyes are blinded, and she hints that I am not what I ought to be. She would not do this were it not for her mother. I only wish there were no such things as mothers-in-law.”

Major Crossley smiled; and then prepared to take leave of George Hamperton.

“Before—before I die,” said George Hamperton hesitatingly, and addressing himself particularly to Major Crossley, “I should like to tell you more than I have yet told you. You will divulge nothing—will you?”

“I will divulge nothing. If you can obtain peace of mind by telling me more than you have told me yet, I shall consider myself bound, in all honour, to regard it as sacred.”

“Thank you. Thank you.”

Then Major Crossley and James Hamperton left the room. At the street door they exchanged

a few words, but these were unimportant. Crossley went his way along the lamp-lit street, and the solicitor went his. More than once during his walk home, Mr. Hamperton stopped to think ; and his reflections seemed more particularly absorbing as he was putting his letters into the post. These safely disposed of, he seemed to walk homewards with more ease.

“ Why should I bother myself about the matter ?” he said. “ Mrs. Prince is going to marry Robert Evershed. Well, they’ll make a good couple, and humanly speaking their progeny will be handsome. I dare say Major Crossley does retain a very tender remembrance of Mrs. Prince : for she’s a magnificent woman, and the man, who, having once liked her, became indifferent, would be a great scamp—or a great ass. She too may think kindly of the Major. A good-looking man, but by far too serious for her. No—I cannot become a partisan of Cupid. Egerton Crossley knows nothing of the whereabouts of Olivia Prince ; and he’s not likely to know anything. In a few weeks she will become another man’s wife. And

there would be such a devil of a stir if I were to go in and make an *éclaircissement* now. Things must take their course. I'm not equal to the part of *Jupiter Tonans*. Besides, romance now in the Bryant family would interfere with the course of business ; and Bryant seems to be in a very comfortable business mood, and eager to dabble in speculation."

Mr. Hamperton walked on to his home musing. He had not noticed that a young woman had watched him leave the house where his brother was lying ill, and then hurry on before him on the other side of the street.

## CHAPTER II.

### MRS. HAMPERTON IS UNEASY.

WHILE James Hamperton was with his brother, Mrs. Hamperton received a visit from a lady, of whom the solicitor had spoken in very disrespectful terms—to wit, Mrs. Calley. The chief business of this elderly lady's life seemed to be devoted to stirring up the native jealousy in Jane Hamperton's breast ; and I am bound to say that she had met of late with a good deal of success in her praiseworthy industry. Mrs. Hamperton would hold out as long as she could in the defence of her husband. She would give way at last, and weepingly admit that James was not



all he should be. That Mrs. Calley had reason to regard Mr. Hamperton with some amount of dislike, is unquestionable. Some while since, after a great deal of trouble, he had succeeded in persuading her to take a little money out of her bank, and invest it in a concern which he had fathered, and which indeed had such a plausible air about it, that the most suspicious could see little to find fault with. The sum entrusted by Mrs. Calley to her son-in-law was not great; and had she lost it all, she would not have been a very extensive sufferer. She did not lose it; but as the affair failed to realize the promised percentage,—a very high one,—she sold out her shares, and said that Hamperton was a cheat.

On this particular afternoon she came and found her daughter sitting disconsolate by the fire, a scent-bottle by her side, and an open novel in her hand, which Mrs. Hamperton had been vainly attempting to peruse.

“Jane! here you are, then, moping! I don’t wonder at it; your husband is a bad ’un!”

Poor Mrs. Hamperton only gave a little sob.

“You ought never to have married him,

Jane; though, to be sure, I am a fool for saying that now, for you've been his wife more than twenty years. Ah! you wouldn't have married him, would you, if you knew then all that you know now?"

"He has been very kind to me, mamma."

"Oh, I dare say! But if he's kind, why do you mope? The fact of it is, you know he's worthless in your heart, only you can't bring yourself openly to say so. It's always the case with you silly women."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! you always make me more miserable when you come, mamma—you do, indeed," Jane Hamperton blurted out.

"Really! now I call that kind—I call that wonderfully kind, to speak so of your mother. You don't know who your best friends are. I'm ashamed of you, Jane! I'm really ashamed of you!"

Poor Mrs. Hamperton fairly broke down now: the tears rolled fast from her eyes.

"You silly, little fool! what are you crying about?—your husband? He isn't worth your

tears. Well, have you discovered that he has visited that house any more?"

"Y—e—s," said Mrs. Hamperton, reluctantly; "I sent Susan to watch him yesterday, and she is to watch him this afternoon."

Mrs. Calley smiled grimly.

"Have you found out anything?" she asked.

"No, only that he goes there twice every day."

"For no good purpose, you may be sure, Jane," said Mrs. Calley, soothingly. "I told you you'd find him out, and you will. I've been suspicious of that man these ten years. I shouldn't be at all surprised to discover that he's been unfaithful in more than one way. Indeed, I may say that I believe he will one day prove to have been a rogue and a swindler."

"Mother!" cried Mrs. Hamperton, in a tone of anguish.

"Hush! here's the servant coming!"

A servant entered.

Mrs. Hamperton was too much alarmed by her mother's last words to question the servant

herself. This Mrs. Calley did for her with all the satisfaction of an Old Bailey barrister turning a witness inside out.

"Well, Susan, have you been watching your master?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And what have you discovered?"

"That he went into the house as usual."

"Oh! how long did he stay?"

"Half an hour."

"Did you see him come out?"

"Yes."

"Well, and after that?"

"I just stayed to see that he came on in this direction, and then I hurried home."

"That's right. Jane, you hear?"

Susan waited.

"You may go. Not a word of this to any one, Susan. If you watch carefully, I will give you a new gown."

Then she whispered to Mrs. Hamperton, "I knew he would be found out. In that house resides your rival. Oh! the villanous man."

Satisfied with Mrs. Calley's promise, and rather pleased to perform the part of spy, Susan prepared to go. She had hardly reached the door, ere Mr. Hamperton's step was heard.

"Susan,"—it was Mr. Hamperton speaking in the hall—"you have been out?"

"He suspects that he has been watched," whispered Jane.

"Let him," answered her mother.

"Susan," repeated Mr. Hamperton, in a lofty voice, "you have been out. Allow me to observe that I have moral objections to young persons walking in the streets these dark November afternoons. I have moral objections, Susan. I shall endeavour to make Mrs. Hamperton entertain the same moral objections. She ought to be more prudent. A hint! If I find that you have been out another afternoon after three o'clock, I shall dismiss you; let that be a warning. I am in a measure answerable for the prudent conduct of all persons in this house, and for the future I shall not forget my responsibility."

And then Mr. Hamperton, who knew per-

fectly well the mission on which Susan had gone out, presented himself before his wife and Mrs. Calley, the impersonation of the virtuous householder.

He shook hands with Mrs. Calley ; he saluted his wife, saying —

“ I am sorry I am over time, my love, but business is not the slave of the affections. By-the-way, I am going out of town to-morrow.”

“ Where ?” said his anxious wife.

“ I am going to Messingham.”

“ On what account ?”

“ You forget, my love, that I was solicitor for the late Dr. Kealwin, and that Mr. Bryant was executor. You can't very much wonder, then, that business renders it necessary that we should meet, more particularly when you call to mind that Mr. Evershed is soon about to marry. I believe, Mrs. Calley, that this marriage with Mrs. Prince is an event which you are disposed to regard in a favourable light.”

“ You've nothing to say against it, have you, Mr. Hamperton ?” said Mrs. Calley, waspishly.

“ I ?—oh, dear me, no ; why should I ? In

many ways I consider the marriage a very desirable one."

Mr. Hamperton spoke in his usually polite manner. He had no wish to irritate Mrs. Calley, though he knew well enough that she regarded him with little favour, and guessed rightly enough that the watch set upon his actions had been one of her suggestions.

"You will do me the honour, Mrs. Calley, of staying to dinner with your daughter and myself." So spoke James Hamperton in his blindest manner.

"As it is so near your dinner hour, you don't suppose I should go away?" So spoke Sarah Calley, irritably. Hamperton was not to be provoked.

"I'm glad—very glad—that your movents, when I and my wife are concerned, are so free from the formalities of the world."

"Hamperton, what a tongue you've got!" cried Mrs. Calley.

"I am glad to say that it has been a serviceable one. Jane"—(to his wife)—"will you be kind enough to ring the bell to give cook some notice that I want my dinner."

During the meal James Hamperton was affectionately attentive to his wife, graciously attentive to Mrs. Calley. As well as he was able, he anticipated the wants of both these ladies, and soon succeeded in smoothing down, so far as his wife was concerned, all asperities of look and temper, which his quick perception had detected as being prevalent when he first entered the room. By degrees his wife's hostility to him decreased; and before the meal was over, she could only upbraid herself for having suspected such an amiable man. "If it wasn't for my mother, how happy I should be with James," she thought. Less influenced by appearances, Mrs. Calley's opinions were not changed a whit. Mr. Hamperton was a humbug: all his plausibility only served to deepen her conviction of this fact.

Very soon after dinner, Mr. Hamperton retired into a room which he was pleased to call his study. As he spent a good many hours here evening after evening, his retiring there on this particular occasion was no very exceptional matter. Rising up from the table, he said—



"I am grieved to leave you ; but my business duties will not allow me to enjoy your society any longer. Mrs. Calley, should I not see you again, you must allow me to wish you good-night."

In another minute Mr. Hamperton was seated at his desk in his study. Lining the walls were book-cases, containing a great number of books of a heterogeneous character—law books ; books on Political Economy ; books on the Principles of Trade ; curious pamphlets, with a few novels, which last, Mr. Hamperton had purchased during his numerous railway journeys. Two or three prints hung from the wall. A few chairs stood at different corners of the room. Under the table in the centre was a large iron chest. A desk stood upon the table—a massive desk, with formidable clasps, into which Mr. Hamperton inserted some curious keys. The desk opened, he placed several papers, taken from his pocket, into it, and then took several papers from the desk. This proceeding over, he opened his cigar case, took therefrom a cigar and proceeded to smoke it, looking at his papers at the same time.

They were curious. Most of them seemed to have been written by the same person ; but there were interlineations added by other hands. The headings were after this fashion—"New Imperial Loan Association (Limited) ;" "The International Assurance Company (Limited) ;" "The Royal English Banking and Discount Company (Limited) ;" "The Austrian, Hungarian, and General Salt-Mine Association (Limited) ;" "The Central Patagonian Railway (Limited) ;" "The English and French Building Society (Limited)." Such were some of the headings of the papers which Mr. Hamperton was now reading. A portion of these papers only contained headings ; the others were filled up with close writing. Some, when he had read them, he laid aside with an ominous shake of the head, and the words—

"Won't do, I fear ! No, Bryant must be got into genuine business—at any rate, at first. When he has tasted a little of the fun, he may go in for the rest. By Gad ! Company making is as bad as dram drinking—when you've once begun, you must go on."

The papers Mr. Hamperton was reading were

the first drafts of various commercial schemes, which were soon to be bidding for favour in the share market. Some of these schemes might ultimately swim, and swim successfully; others would never see daylight, and a good many would have their little day, and then disappear for ever—entailing loss on the majority of those who had given them genuine support, but putting certain satisfactory sums of money into the pockets of the persons who had the getting of them up. To start a company for the real purpose of winding it up was a work in which James Hamperton had won some considerable distinction. Those prolific mines—that promising line of railroad—that world-benefiting invention—that useful patent—that sure-to-be-remunerative banking association,—how nice all these things looked on paper; how profitless of any good, save to the astute gentleman who had drawn the attention of a money-supplied public to them!

Mr. Hamperton managed the entire business so well, that he had never yet been compromised by any failure, however disreputable.

He had a dexterous way of getting out of any speculation when its moral character was becoming tarnished ; and he had been astonished more than once at his good luck in being able to destroy his connexion with companies upon which the blaze of daylight had fallen, and revealed rottenness to the core.

From the mass of papers before him James Hamperton selected three, upon which he bestowed very careful attention.

These three were the prospectuses of a Bank, of a Building Company, which was to erect substantial habitations in a growing English watering-place, and an Insurance Society.

"These will do, I think, for Bryant. Safe all. Must get him to be director of at least two of them—chairman of one, if possible. Ah ! he'll do well at 'em—sure to do well at 'em !"

Did any remembrance of Mr. Proby's speculations, sanguine hopes, and disastrous fate, visit James Hamperton then ? Yes ; for he said,—

“Poor Proby. I wish he had done better ; I really do. I wonder what has become of his daughter ? Fine girl—splendid girl ! It was lucky I had that hold over her in the matter of her love for Mr. Evershed ; for if she’d split, it would have been very uncomfortable for James Hamperton. You ought to have stuck to that girl, Evershed. But, oh, man ! man ! man ! you are fickle—in your best moments you are fickle ! I should like to see the man who never loved more than one woman !”

Having discharged himself of this bit of a sentiment, Mr. Hamperton relit his cigar, which had gone out, and resumed his prospectuses. His cigar finished, and the contents of the prospectuses mastered, the solicitor took a sheet of foolscap, and began writing thereon. One of the most curious features of this MS. was the frequent recurrence of the letters B and H, apparently the initials of names. Was it possible that B stood for Bryant and H for Hamperton ? Nothing indeed was more possible. This paper contained a cleverly drawn up scheme of speculation, in which Mr. Bryant

and Hamperton were to be jointly concerned ; sharing profits together, but not sharing danger in the same proportion.

Though things were now going satisfactorily with Mr. Hamperton, that gentleman very well knew that such might not be the case always. So hazardous was his profession, owing to the constant fluctuations in the public favour or credulity to which his speculating enterprises were subject, that he might well think of taking measures for giving some substantial security to his future position. His profession was more than hazardous, it was dangerous ; and there were eventualities which might result in something even worse than ruin to him—irretrievable dishonour. He had begun to find lately that he was looked upon by men of worth and substance with suspicion ; that people, with whom he had done business for years on terms of equality, were less familiar with him than heretofore, and seemed to wish to have as little as possible to do with him. He was not in the least alarmed ; though he was boastful by nature, he was really courageous, and fronted difficulties with a calmness which

some of his colleagues envied. The support of a gentleman like Mr. Bryant, whose wealth was great, and whose position in his county forbade the notion that he could in any way be connected with commercial enterprises that were anything but perfectly respectable, was the very thing which James Hamperton needed. With such support, he would be able to carry the speculations now on hand to a successful issue, and originate fresh ones with equally hopeful results. Any suspicion which might have been current lately would disappear. Mr. Bryant's high respectability would do duty for Mr. Hamperton's; and if the new companies promoted should ever come to grief, through an unexpected turn of fortune, Mr. Bryant's name would be a protecting ægis, against which the strokes of his enemies would fall in vain.

Mr. Hamperton wrote his scheme, read it carefully, and then placed it back in the desk with the rest of the other papers, closing the desk and locking it.

"I shall do, I think. I shall do," he said to himself. "By another twelve months I will

have established a position which shall be unassailable." Then he drew his chair to the fire, and lit another cigar, every curling whiff of smoke, as it ascended to the ceiling, being a commercial scheme, by which he was to mount upwards in power, wealth, and importance. His fancy so pleasantly employing itself, did not see in the wreaths of smoke circling round and round him, until he sat in a perfect mist of twisted chains, anything symbolical of his being enmeshed in these same commercial schemes, until all power of extrication was hopeless.

Mrs. Calley passed the evening with her daughter, and frightened that poor lady out of her wits. If Mr. Hamperton had had a hand in all the murders which had then lately made the papers an exciting catalogue of jobs that would have disgraced the shambles, Mrs. Calley could not have had a worse opinion of him. "You may depend upon it, my dear"—this, for the twentieth time during the course of Jane's miserable evening—"you will hear before long that he does something desperate."



As she was leaving her daughter, she said :  
“Don’t give up watching him ! Don’t !  
And don’t you pay any regard to that glib  
tongue of his. Keep your eye too on that house  
where he calls so often. Watch him—watch  
him always !”

James Hamperton, airily spinning his day-dreams, had no fear that his malevolent mother-in-law would soon dissipate their baseless fabric.

## CHAPTER III.

### JAMES HAMPERTON IN HIS ELEMENT.

By twelve o'clock the next morning, James Hamperton and Mr. Bryant were closeted together in the latter gentleman's library. There was an array of papers before them, and Mr. Hamperton, in his flourishing manner, was doing his best to explain to his companion their nature and purport. If the solicitor ever enjoyed supreme happiness, it was when he had the good fortune to meet a gentleman, with intentions similar to those now held by Mr. Bryant, and to instruct the novitiate of speculation in his heart-thrilling work. No priest ever more

extatically dilated upon the spiritual delights of monastic or conventual life than did Mr. Hamperton dilate upon the beauties of speculation and the enduring fascination of watching the share market.

"I can assure you, Bryant," he exclaimed, after shaking hands with his friend, "there's no life like that of an active man of business. How glad I am that you do not rest satisfied with the independency which you inherited from your ancestors. It looks well when large landowners like you step down into the arena of the commercial world."

Thus Mr. Hamperton, by way of complimenting his new victim.

For the mania which had seized more experienced men than Mr. Bryant had at last seized him. The mania which had caused country clergymen, out of their hard-earned income, to invest their savings in some speciously represented commercial scheme, with the hope of a splendid per-centage! the mania which had seized upon widows of scanty property, and led them to embark it in enterprises, which

were so tempting, in that they promised to double their small fortunes! the mania which had made hard working men grow distrustful of the means by which they had hitherto lived and prospered, inducing them to rely upon the rapid, but fitful movements in the speculating world! the mania which had emptied the safe pocket of the hitherto wary tradesman, and carried away his possessions to the unsafe keeping of a joint stock company's strong-box! the mania which had seized on the high and low, rich and poor—making the rich poor, and the poor poorer still! the mania which had worried into fever clear-headed, far-sighted men of business; which was disturbing all principles of trade, and threatening to revolutionise them; which had frightened the strong; which had made the most courageous tremble; which had wrought such strange results in many thousand families of this kingdom! the mania which had seized nobleman and commoner alike: making the almost unknown John Thomas, Esq. (albeit M.P. for the insignificant borough of Littlepuddle,) a conspicuous personage as Director.

(living at Heavyland Lodge, Heavyland,) of the Joint Stock General Stocking Supplying Company (Limited), subscribed capital 2,000,000 ; paid up capital 900,000 : making the equally unknown Jones Robinson Smith (M.P., of course,) and hailing from 555, Park Lane, and Doyle Court, Derbyshire, Chairman of the United New Zealand and South Australian Gold and Oil Association—capital subscribed, noughts by the score ; paid up, ditto : throwing a halo of glory around the bald head of Sir John James Philip Brown, Bart., K.C.B., who was supposed to have distinguished himself, years ago, in some wonderful action in a remote part of the world, but whose income was painfully limited ; as Chairman of the Universal Ore Company (Limited)—of course—with a subscribed capital which would have bought half London. Poor man ! he had only ten shares in the Company, and these were bought for him by the projectors, who saw game in his name and title, and somewhat hypothetical renown, as a distinguished soldier : placing in apparently enviable positions as chairmen and directors,

half the noodles and humbugs with which this world—all too much be-ridden by noodles and humbugs—has the misfortune to be afflicted! the mania which, with all the good it has done in employing much idle capital, has been fertile in mischief, which it will take a quarter of a century to undo!

Behold Mr. Bryant an innocent victim of this mania!

Behold Mr. Hamperton endeavouring to make the seizure seem pleasant, and, as it were, perfectly consonant with a sound state of health!

“Now, Bryant, I wish to draw your attention, first, to a bank. It will be a magnificent thing—with branches in Paris and New York—a bank, sir, which will drive many of his present flourishing rivals out of the field. Will you be a director, and take—well, say one thousand shares, to begin with? As a director, your duties will not be heavy. The management have the working of the affair. You will be a director?”

Now, Mr. Bryant has an impression that, to be the director of a bank is to hold a very

honourable and enviable position, and he says—  
“ Well, I have no objection.”

Mr. Hamperton makes a mark in his notebook, and then proceeds to explain, in a charmingly glib manner, the method by which this bank is to be worked, and the brilliant openings for such an enterprise ; Mr. Bryant nodding his head as he drinks in Mr. Hamperton’s explanation—an explanation, by the way, which he fully believes he comprehends, but does not. Mr. Hamperton has a charming way of seeming lucid when he is quite the opposite ; and it is also this gentleman’s misfortune that he deceives himself whilst he is deceiving others. For a conscious humbug there is hope, as there is for the conscious liar. But there is no hope for the unconscious humbug, as there is no hope for the unconscious liar.

Mr. Hamperton winds up his brilliant exposition of this new banking principle with an effective peroration, in which Sentiment walks amiably with Business ; and then he tools forth another scheme.

“ Bolton-on-the-Ford,” says he, “ is a rising

watering-place, and I am in negotiation with some men of capital, amongst whom are two or three large builders, for erecting houses on this spot—a hotel, an assembly room, a bath house, a new pier, a dissenting chapel, a district church, a promenade—in short, to create the place! I have the opinion of several doctors—I may say, of our most eminent men—upon the salubrity of the air, and the general sanitary advantages of the locality. The scenes in the neighbourhood are very picturesque; the sea is as fine as any in England. In two years the place will be built, and the Company building it bids fair to be one of the most commanding features of the day. Now, Mr. Bryant, will you be its chairman? we have, of course, a temporary chairman, but it is desirable to get a man of territorial—that's the word—importance, like yourself! Will you honour the Company by taking the office? I intend to invest largely, for my impression of the triumphant success of the scheme is great."

"Bolton-on-the-Ford, you say?"

"Yes. Bolton-on-the-Ford, in the neigh-



bouring county, by the way—Suffolk ; you know the place ?”

“ Yes.”

“ And knowing it, don’t you think that our scheme promises well ?”

“ I may say I do !”

“ Bravo. I haven’t a doubt of it. I regard this enterprise with especial enthusiasm. We shall make the place—or rather we shall create the place ! I can fully sympathise with the spirits of the Roman colonist as he erected his cities on the bank of the Rhine and the Rhone ! And now, how many shares shall I say—a thousand ?”

“ A thousand !”

“ You surely won’t take less. Repent it if you do. Bolton-on-the-Ford will be a tremendous fact !”

“ Well—five hundred, at first !”

“ Good !” And Mr. Hamperton makes a few notes in his book. “ You will be our chairman ?”

“ I have no objection.”

Mr. Hamperton makes more notes—and then slapping his book on the table says :—

“Look at the comprehensiveness of our scheme. There is scarcely a want that we do not supply. We erect shops for the convenience of every possible trade. We engage two doctors—a homœopathic doctor, and an alopathic doctor—and we propose also to hire an effective band—two if needed—for what can be more delightful than the roaring of the waves and the blowing of brass instruments? Nature and art are united into a beautiful duet! Our hotel will be arranged on the principles of that of the ‘Louvre,’ the tariff economical, but ranging in proportion to the storeys. All that far-seeing enterprise, all that knowledge of the various wants of a pleasureable kind can accomplish, will be accomplished in our Assembly Rooms! And religion—religion, Mr. Bryant (for to leave out religion at a watering place would entail ruin on us), will receive our comprehensive attention. Our national Church will have a superb building devoted to it; organ from the best makers, and choristers duly trained; and our dissenting brethren will have a handsome chapel, and every other accommodation for their spiritual wants!

Bigotry will have no sway at Bolton-on-the-Ford !”

And Mr. Hamperton having dwelt eloquently upon his Building Company, and the great public good which was to be derived when Bolton-on-the-Ford was a flourishing watering place, and having furthermore obtained the countenance of Mr. Bryant’s name, and the more useful favour, embodied in his very handsome subscription to the scheme, he advocated with all his wonted ingenuity the cause of another company, which was to be as profitable to the shareholders as that which was to transform a little fishing village into a thriving watering place. His tongue, successful hitherto in causing Mr. Bryant’s views to accord with his own, was successful again ; and the new insurance society which was to eclipse the Royal Exchange, the Pelican and Phoenix, and other companies of a similar kind was to have a director in Mr. Bryant, of Messingham Priory, and monetary assistance from the same gentleman to a very considerable amount.

Mr. Bryant’s mania was unusually acute ; and

James Hamperton (leaving out of his consideration Mr. Proby,) had never met with a gentleman whom he had, so to speak, so easily manipulated.

"I shall be in London in a day or two," said Mr. Bryant, as the conference was coming to an end; "and then you and I will talk those matters over again. As my daughter is so shortly going to marry, she finds it necessary to go to town to purchase a variety of things, which only newly married people think of buying."

So this morning's business was brought to a finish. The solicitor gathered up his papers, to which he had again, and again called the attention of his companion, and put them in his leather-bag. Then the two gentlemen arose from the table, with faces expressive of their being perfectly satisfied with their morning's work.

James Hamperton made no reference on the present occasion to that clever scheme he had drawn upon paper, whereby Mr. Bryant and himself were to undertake together certain

“commercial” enterprises, to employ a term in high favour with the solicitor. The time had not come for the ripening of this scheme; being in embryo awhile, its ulterior development would be none the worse; and Mr. Hamperton was a man who could wait. The possession of a milch cow must be very gratifying to its owner, but it will be much the better for him if he do not pull the udders too often. Mr. Bryant promised to be a very useful milch cow—vulgar though expressive term—but Mr. Hamperton thought twice before he put its milk-yielding powers to the strongest test.

“James Hamperton,” thought he, as he and Mr. Bryant arose from the table, “your little game will soon be made. In meeting with Bryant I met with my greatest bit of luck. What an ass, though, I was, not to have gone to work on him before.”

When Mr. Bryant and Mr. Hamperton left the library and adjourned to the drawing-room, whom should they find there but Mr. Evershed, who had just ridden over from Langbourne, and who, presumably, was waiting with all a lover’s

sense of ardent expectation for the arrival of Olivia Prince.

Mr. Bryant shook hands with him, asked him a few common-place questions, and then left him and Mr. Hamperton together. To have greatness, as it were, thrust upon him, as had been Mr. Bryant's case, was such an overwhelming experience, that he became constrained to enjoy the pleasures of solitude; so he wandered forth into the garden, glowing imaginatively as prospective chairman of the Bolton-on-the-Ford Building Company, and as director of a world-compelling new bank, and new insurance society.

So it came to pass that Mr. Hamperton and Mr. Evershed were together. The former never lost sight of an opportunity of giving vent to a little sentimentality. Here was an opportunity with Robert Evershed, of which he availed himself.

"Ah! and so you are going to marry! Happy man! happy, happy man! I almost envy you, although I've had a wife, for—hum! a good many years—I forget how many.

Ah ! and you are going to marry Olivia Prince ?”

“ It looks like it,” said Mr. Evershed.

“ Excuse me, I thought that your fancy strongly favoured Miss Proby.”

Robert Evershed gave a shrug of the shoulders, but it was a shrug which was not altogether expressive of what he meant it to be. It seemed to say that he was rather uncomfortable in his mind than that what Mr. Hamperton said was all nonsense.”

Quick to see most things, Mr. Hamperton saw this ; but seeing this, he did not abandon his sentimental strain.

“ My dear fellow,” he went on, “ we men are none of us perfect. Alas ! that we are not. In the matter of women,—grievous as it is,—we are notoriously imperfect. I am an older man than you, Robert Evershed, and I make this assertion, having had a strong, a very strong, experience to prove it. I really do not wonder at your seeing charms in Olivia Prince, which you were powerless to resist. If I had been a younger man,—if I had been a man without

ties, I should have become her slave as you have become."

"Her slave!" said Robert Evershed, reddening, "her slave!"

The full significance of the blush which dyed Evershed's face when Mr. Hamperton uttered the word "slave," was not lost upon the solicitor.

"Are we not all slaves when we are in love?" said Mr. Hamperton, gallantly; "do we not yield up all the independence upon which we used to pride ourselves?"

"Scarcely that," said Robert, quickly.

"Then you are a different man to me," answered Hamperton. "When I fell in love, I said to the world, 'Go to the devil;' to myself I said, 'You must have no wish until the lady of your affections gives the cue as to the direction she wishes to take.' But we are becoming uncomfortably metaphysical. Let us quit the clouds, and place ourselves on terra firma. To speak without employing poetical metaphors, I thought you and Miss Proby were in love, or engaged to each other; and here I find you



are about to marry one of the most charming women in creation, Olivia Prince. I may have been mistaken——”

“Do you know where Miss Proby is?” asked Robert, suddenly.

“I?—No. How should I?”

“She——”

Before Robert Evershed could complete his sentence the door opened, and Olivia Prince, fascinating in every smile of her face, in every movement of her body, entered the room.

“Oh, Robert, you must excuse my not coming before,” she said, as she shook hands with the gentleman who was soon to be her husband. “And did you ride or drive over?”

“I rode over,” returned Mr. Evershed.

Mrs. Prince’s reception of James Hamperton was very friendly, and that gentleman of course made some gallant remark. Then, as delicately as he could, he watched these two persons, wishing to ascertain, by his own observation, whether they seemed to be much in love with each other. Olivia sat down and chatted with Mr. Evershed in a perfectly friendly manner;

but if Mr. Hamperton's eyes were not wrong, she did not appear to be very much in love with him. There was that nameless something wanting in their slight intercourse, and Mr. Hamperton wondered what effect would be produced were he to mention the name of Egerton Crossley.

"You scarcely expected me, did you?" asked Robert.

"No, I don't think I did."

Mr. Hamperton laughed and said—

"When I was a young man I always found that my unexpected visits to the admirable lady who is now my wife were the most satisfactory, as all unanticipated pleasures are. And this reminds me that I must write a letter to Mrs. Hamperton."

"Here's my portfolio," said Olivia; "that's at your service."

"I—alas! can't hope to find any rough copies of the amatory epistles with which you favour our friend here," said Mr. Hamperton, as he opened the portfolio.

"We'll leave Mr. Hamperton here," said

Olivia, carelessly, "and go and look at the new boat-house." As she and Mr. Evershed were leaving the room by the window, she added, "We expect Emily and her governess home from Haystone to-day. The carriage has already been sent to the station to meet them."

"Indeed! I didn't know," said Robert, and this announcement, if his face spoke truly, was anything but welcome. That in all probability he would meet Sibylla Proby in this house he was well aware, but that he would meet her to-day he had no apprehension, or he would not have ridden over from Langbourne.

Mr. Hamperton went on with his letter, and then cast his eyes in the direction which Robert and Olivia were taking. His note finished, placed in an envelope, and this directed, he sat at the table making fantastic marks on the blotting-pad, and thinking aloud.

"No—she doesn't care for him—she doesn't care for him—I could swear it. She did not meet him as a woman meets the man she loves. Ah!"—(looking towards the window)—"they are still walking about the lawn. Magnificent

woman, certainly—nobody can dispute that. Yes, she's got her hand in his arm, but if my eye-sight does not deceive me, it rests there in a very unemotional condition. They are laughing, I fancy—yes, they are, but that's not a lover's laugh, by gad if it is! She thinks he is a good-looking, clever young man, and she consequently admires him. She has a due appreciation of his wealth; and she's not to be blamed either. She knows that he will be an intelligent companion, but she doesn't in her heart care for him. And he—well, he's looking into her face now with profound admiration. He's under a spell. But does he love her really? Can't answer this question. There they go. If she very much cared for him, she would rather wish that their promenade were less free from observation, for a man can't very well indulge in osculation before a house with a dozen windows in the front. Ah! now they are disappearing. He seems to be leading the way; not the lady. I wish I was up that cedar-tree, so that I might see whether he kisses her or not, but of course he will. Will

she submit to it as a præ-matrimonial necessity, or will she welcome it with a lover's glad delight? Egad! James Hamperton, you are yet too poetical! Arouse yourself, my man!"

Suddenly he heard the grating of carriage wheels, and the next moment saw a carriage approaching the house. It stopped, and Mr. Bryant appeared at the door to welcome its occupants. Emily Bryant jumped into her father's arms, saying—

"Oh, papa. I'm so glad I'm home again. And I'm quite well."

The next person who descended from the carriage was a young lady, dressed in mourning. From the place where he was sitting, Mr. Hamperton could see her well. The figure was known to him: the face was known to him. And his own face changed painfully as he recognised hers. Starting up from his seat, he exclaimed—

"By the Lord! Sibylla Proby is Emily Bryant's governess—and here she is!"

## CHAPTER IV.

“DID YOU EVER LOVE ME, ROBERT?”

AT luncheon, which was soon announced, Miss Proby, Mr. James Hamperton, and Mr. Robert Evershed met. Before Sibylla appeared at the table, she knew that she would meet Mr. Evershed, a servant having mentioned his name and arrival within her hearing. But she was unprepared to see the other. She met both gentlemen with firmness. Mr. Hamperton had no great reason for wishing to see Sibylla Proby, least of all in the house of Mr. Bryant, on such an occasion as the present. If he once possessed power over her for keeping her silent upon what

had taken place between her father and himself, it was questionable whether he possessed that power now. Her father's ruin was attributable to the steps he had taken under his advice, and his daughter's persuasion. Was this daughter at all likely, finding that the man, for whom she had guiltily sacrificed her father's interest, was no longer faithful to her, to take any measures calculated to throw a light on Mr. Hamperton's past proceedings? As he ate his broiled chicken, he was painfully engaged with this question. Sibylla had exhibited great surprise when she noticed the presence of Mr. Hamperton. This was all. There was nothing in her conduct which could show that she regarded this gentleman as her enemy. But, if the solicitor was not mistaken, she had a quiet way of veiling what she did intend to do or say.

Although you may drown your miseries at midnight by champagne, or some coarser beverage, and lay flattering unction to your soul by repeating the words of Dryden—"Trust on—and think to-morrow will repay," you will find this proceeding result in unsatisfactory effects in

the daytime. You may deceive yourself and your friends when the gas is turned on; but you will have some difficulty if you attempt to do so in open daylight. Conscience will not easily be drugged then. So, Robert Evershed, though partaking of a very excellent luncheon, and making pretence of enjoying it, was not altogether easy in his mind in the matter of Sibylla Proby. Boiled chicken is very nice: savoury omelette is very palatable; scoloped oysters are very appetizing; tortured cream smoothed down by jam makes a very excellent dish; but these delicacies served up at luncheon do not minister to a mind diseased, and pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow. Sibylla Proby sat opposite Robert Evershed at table; and her presence did not enhance his enjoyment of such good things as graced Mr. Bryant's board.

Mr. Hamperton, genial as he was at most times, even in the face of difficulties and unpleasantnesses which might well have disturbed his equanimity, was tasked in his endeavours to show himself off to advantage. He was not himself. He could master neither sentiment



nor persiflage. He was glad when the luncheon was over.

So it would seem was Robert Evershed, seeing the haste with which he left the room, wandered into the garden, and lit a cigar.

No—he was not happy. And if the truth must be told, he had not been happy for several weeks. The sudden possession of great wealth, the complete removal of the oppressing burthen under which he had long groaned, had not given him enduring pleasure ; for, disguise the fact as he would, he had done wrong ; and on this particular day he had received an unmistakable remembrancer of the wrong that he had done.

That he had once loved Sibylla Proby very dearly, he could not deny ; and it would have puzzled him to describe his present feelings with regard to her. Although Mr. Robert Evershed was to be married to Mrs. Prince, I do not think that he was entirely indifferent to Sibylla. Had Olivia Prince touched his heart ? She had pleased his fancy—she had captivated his senses—but had she done more than this ? In the familiarity of

married life, would the sentiment, which was now wanting, come? Very much questioning whether it would, Robert Evershed was powerless to drag himself out of the range of Olivia's fascinations. Intoxicated by a passion which had its roots in some of the least noble of our faculties, and knowing that he only lay under a spell for which there was no assurance of its lasting power, he was unable to free himself from the charm. He was even doubtful whether his marriage would be a happy one; but he could not draw back from it now. Wrong-doing had wrought its inevitable consequences. As he smoked his cigar, and taking little heed of his path, left the Priory garden, and strolled into the plantations, so mused he.

After he had strolled about these plantations some time, diverting his gloomy imagination by watching the rabbits, he sat down on one of the benches which had been conveniently placed here and there. He had not been sitting long before he heard the footsteps of someone approaching. It was with a curious feeling that he immediately afterwards recognised Sibylla

Proby. She had not come here purposely to meet him, for she had no knowledge of his whereabouts ; but was on her way to the village with some letters for the post. At seeing Robert she started a little, but came on.

Mr. Evershed spoke first :—" It is some time since we met."

" Not so very long, I think, though it seems long to me. When I last parted from you, I little thought if we met again, that we should meet as we do to-day." She spoke this very firmly, and looked steadily at Robert as she spoke.

He flicked the ash from his cigar, and bent his eyes to the ground. When he met her an hour or so ago at the luncheon table, he noticed that she had altered in her appearance. The change seemed more conspicuous now. The face was thinner and paler—the light was less bright in her eyes—the figure had lost much of its graceful contour—the black hair was less luxuriant. And this—yes—this was his work. A pang of anguish shot through his heart as conviction of this fact forced itself upon him.

"You are thinking that I am changed," said Sibylla. "I am—very, very much. I have been miserable. I am miserable now: and I shall change more yet!"

How these words cut him. His averted face painfully contracting, told Sibylla this.

She went on, unpityingly:—

"Do you know what I wish? I wish that I had never seen you—and that I was lying by my father's side in Langbourne churchyard."

She spoke these words coldly, but with a weird intensity. The accusing voice of a dying man—the touch of his cold hand, of such things Sibylla's manner of speech reminded Robert Evershed.

"I wish," she said again, "that I was lying by my father's side, in Langbourne church-yard. To wish this, you may guess how miserable I am."

"Sibylla," Robert said at last. "Don't speak so."

"I am only speaking the truth. Knowing what I did, I never wished to meet you again; but, as I have met you, I will, at least, speak

openly. Remember, I never wrote any letters to upbraid you. And I didn't seek this interview. If you had not spoken to me—I—mind this—would not have spoken to you, and told you what I have. Now, that you and I have met again, I wish to ask you a question or two. Will you answer them?"

"Yes, if I can," replied Robert, after some hesitation.

"You can answer them. Did you ever love me, Robert?"

Evershed winced.

"Did you ever love me? I do not ask you whether you do now. I am speaking of the past."

"You know," said Robert, hesitatingly; "you know that I loved you!"

"You said so then. Looking back to that time, with the light of the present to guide you, can you tell me that you spoke the truth, then?"

"Yes—yes." This hesitatingly.

"You say you loved me. I must believe you—bitter, bitter as it is. Now, I have another question, and you must answer it. Do you love Olivia Prince?"

"Is that a fair question?" said Robert, after a moment's pause.

"It is fair, coming from me. Do you love Olivia Prince?"

Robert gave no reply.

"I am waiting for your answer," said Sibylla, slowly.

Still Robert did not speak.

Again she put the question.

"Robert," said Sibylla, as he still continued to make no reply; "I know you do not love her. You need give me no answer now, for I can read your thoughts. You do not love her: and yet you will marry her. If I wished to be revenged on you, because you won my heart—coldly told me that I was too poor to be your wife—became at last willing to take me as a wife when it was thought likely that I should bring the man I married a certain amount of property,—and separated yourself from me;—if I wished to be revenged on you for having done all this, could I have better revenge than that which will follow on your marrying a wife whom you do not love? If I hated you I could not

pray for anything worse to happen than what assuredly will !”

If Sibylla had any doubts as to whether she was altogether right in her surmise, the silence which followed her last words answered her.

“ But I don’t wish you evil, Robert,” said Sibylla, softening a little. “ I can’t wish you evil. You do not love me now : that I know. What good looks I had are gone ; and I am changed, so changed. But if I have spoken with any truth upon the nature of your relationship with Mrs. Prince—if though she loves you, you have no real regard in your heart for her—do not, do not make her your wife.”

“ You are unselfish, at least, Sibylla,” said Robert ; “ but——” he hesitated.

“ Well !—You will have your own way I see. And why should I interfere ? You will marry Mrs. Prince—I have spoken enough.”

The next moment Sibylla Proby resumed her walk, and Mr. Evershed was strolling back through the plantations to the garden.

“ Where have you been ?” asked Mrs. Prince, when he re-entered the drawing-room. “ I’ve missed you for such a time.”

"I've been smoking two or three cigars—and I thought you didn't care for their perfume."

She had no suspicion of the interview which had just taken place: and standing before him in the ripeness of her glorious womanhood—bright of eye, and merry of voice—she riveted the chain on him tighter than ever. If he had been shaken in his purposes by the words of Sibylla Proby, all that was mended now. "Come weal—come woe—Olivia Prince should be his wife."

When Mr. Evershed, a short while afterwards, was riding home to Langbourne,—for he declined Mr. Bryant's invitation to stay to dinner, for two reasons, one of which was the presence of Miss Proby, and the other the darkness of the November evenings,—he said to himself again and again, that nothing should prevent his making Olivia his wife. He said this with the desperation of a man who, contemplating an action which may result in evil, will nevertheless commit himself to a fight with fate, because fate is a worthy antagonist. As he had pledged himself to a life of self-denial for the



achievement of a laudable object, doubtful all the while whether this object would ever be attained, and clung unswervingly to his resolve until sudden relief came, so Robert Evershed determined to act now in the matter of Olivia Prince.

## CHAPTER V.

### JAMES HAMPERTON AND SIBYLLA PROBY'S COMPACT.

WHILST Mr. Bryant and Mr. Hamperton were sitting over their wine, Mrs. Prince and Miss Proby were ineffectually endeavouring to derive amusement from each other's society in the drawing-room : or, to speak correctly, Olivia was trying to make herself agreeable to Sibylla, and trying to think that she liked her. Mrs. Prince was aware that there had been some passages of a tender nature between Mr. Evershed and Miss Proby, but she had no suspicion of their real importance. And as Olivia was now

engaged to him, she thought all she could do was to be as friendly as possible to the person who might possibly have hoped to win the prize which had fallen to her lot. She had no jealousy in her disposition; and was perfectly easy when she thought that Robert would have frequent opportunities of seeing Sibylla.

To all her friendly advances Sibylla was cold; it pained her to know that Olivia was trying to be friendly with her. For she certainly had not self-forgetfulness enough to care, or to pretend to care, anything about Mrs. Prince. Sibylla had guessed pretty accurately the nature of Mr. Evershed's regards for her; but in estimating the affection of the lady, she had made a mistake: she really believed that Olivia was passionately in love with Robert. Having been so herself, it was hard for her to think that anyone, if she cared for him at all, could be otherwise.

To all Olivia's questions she gave answers as short as possible; putting no questions in return, until she heard the dining-room door opening, as if the gentlemen had left their wine, when she said quietly,—

"Do you know much of Mr. Hamperton?"

"Oh, yes; papa has known him for a long time. He was one of Dr. Kealwin's solicitors."

"Has he visited Messingham now on Dr. Kealwin's business?"

"Partly on his business, and partly, I believe, on papa's."

"Is he Mr. Bryant's solicitor?"

"No. But it seems that papa is tired of leading a lazy independent life, and that, like a good many more people—who have no need to do so—he is going to have something to do with business. I'm very ignorant of such matters, Miss Proby, and haven't been very inquisitive as to what papa means to do. But I dare say he knows what he is about. You and Mr. Hamperton have met before, have you not?"—  
This carelessly.

"Yes."

But before Sibylla could say another word, the gentleman of whom she was about to speak entered the room. Miss Proby's eyes turned towards Mr. Hamperton as he entered, and gave him unmistakably to know that he

had been the subject of conversation. He felt a little uncomfortable, but the manner in which Olivia received him afforded him the pleasant assurance that nothing had as yet been said prejudicial to his character.

As Mr. Hamperton drank his tea and ate his toast, he was singularly silent. Indeed, he had not been Mr. Hamperton since the arrival at the Priory of Sibylla Proby. His cup of tea drank, and his morsel of toast eaten, he sat turning over the leaves of a book at a table reflectively, occasionally making a remark; but on the whole being unwontedly quiet. Suddenly his manner changed. Turning to Mrs. Prince, he said—

“I see you think I am very bad company this evening. I confess that I am. I hope you will pardon me. It is not often that I allow any thoughts upon my professional avocations to interfere with my social pleasures. When I enter a drawing-room, it is my custom to say—‘Cares of the world, avaunt!’ I have not done so on the present occasion; and I am puzzled to give a reason. But one train of thought led

to another, until I temporarily forgot where I was, until I temporarily forgot the duties prescribed by social civilised life. But, Mrs. Prince, my train of thought has at last led me to this point. I need your services—services which you were good enough to place at my disposal for the same object, some six or seven months ago.”

“My services, Mr. Hamperton?” said Olivia Prince; “they are yours, if they can confer on you any pleasure.”

“They can. You remember that I once asked you for a certain volume of the ‘Illustrated London News,’ containing a diagram of a scientific invention, in which I was then much interested? If possible, I should like to see that diagram again, and to read the accompanying explanation. The invention has been tried on two or three lines of railway; but it has not answered all expectations. Having done my best to popularise it, I should be glad to read the history of its principles again, as described by a scientific pen. If I remember rightly, you were kind enough to bring me the volume, when I

first wanted it ; but if you will tell me where it is, I will spare you all trouble by getting it myself."

"I will get the volume for you," said Olivia, her face turning a shade paler.

"Thank you—thank you !" said James Hamperton. Then to himself—"She well remembers what is on the same page as the diagram : of this I am sure by the change in her face. She has not yet forgotten Egerton Crossley."

James Hamperton's desire to see the diagram of the invention was entirely feigned. The inventor had been a bankrupt these five months, and his invention had proved a failure on every line upon which it had been tried. His object in bringing up the subject was to know whether the person, whose likeness appeared on the same sheet as the engraving, was remembered now, as he was before Olivia Prince had engaged herself to become Robert Evershed's wife.

"You did not forget the volume, then," said James Hamperton, carelessly, when Mrs. Prince placed it before him.

Mr. Hamperton opened the book, and Mrs. Prince lingered by his side a few seconds. There

was the diagram ; and there was the likeness of Egerton Crossley, the man whom Hamperton had seen as lately as last night, the man whom Olivia believed to be lying far away in an Indian grave. The solicitor took from his pocket a piece of paper, upon which, as he read the explanation of the diagram, he kept making a few notes. Mrs. Prince moved to the fire, her face, as she sat down, being turned abstractedly towards it ; but Hamperton could see that the expression had changed—that it had a sad, regretful look, such as few persons saw on Olivia's bright, handsome countenance. The memory of the past had risen before her mind's eye again ; the memory of the past had lost none of its old power.

“ If Miss Proby is brooding any mischief against me, I know how to act. Olivia Prince's heart is Egerton Crossley's still.” Thus thought Mr. Hamperton, writing. What he wrote did not entirely refer to the diagram. At the bottom of the paper upon which he made his notes, he added a few words addressed to Sibylla. Then perceiving that Olivia Prince



was looking neither at him, nor at Miss Proby, and that Mr. Bryant, leaning backwards in a large arm-chair, was apparently indulging in Quixotic dreams as to the success of his speculation, Mr. Hamperton glanced meaningly at Miss Proby, and signed to her to come to the table: pointing to the piece of paper, which lay on the now closed volume.

With some curiosity, Sibylla obeyed him. The words of the paper were this:—"Miss Proby—Perhaps you have good reason to regard me with enmity. Before you do anything to gratify this enmity, favour me with a private interview. You will not regret it. Towards the end of the evening I shall retire to the study to smoke. Invent some excuse, and meet me there.—J. H."

Sibylla Proby read these lines with surprise, but she bent her head as if in assent to their suggestion; then she glided to her place again; and Mr. Hamperton destroyed what he had written.

The evening passed very quietly: Olivia, whose mind had gone back to past times, thanks

to James Hamperton's ingeniously timed movements, speaking but little; Sibylla Proby imitating the silence of Mrs. Prince; and Mr. Bryant, as he revelled in the prospective importance of figuring before the world as Chairman of this Company and Director of that, and getting a handsome per centage for money laid out according to Mr. Hamperton's directions, being too much mentally preoccupied to say much. As the clock on the mantel-piece struck ten, Mr. Hamperton got up from his chair, and said:—

“With your permission, Mr. Bryant, and yours, Mrs. Prince, I'll go and have a cigar in the study.”

“Go; by all means,” said Mr. Bryant. “I wish I could join you; but I can't smoke, and what is worse still, I can't sit in a room where anybody else is smoking.” (Of which fact James Hamperton had been well aware, or he would not have arranged to meet Miss Proby in the study, which was the usual resort of those who were anxious for a cigar.)

“It is a bad habit—this smoking,” remarked Hamperton to Olivia Prince, as he was leaving

the room. "A bad habit—but I am too old to break it now."

Mrs. Prince made some common-place reply, and then the solicitor left the room. In the study he found a comfortable fire burning, by which he seated himself, reflectively. Then he slowly brought out his cigar case; lit a cigar, and said to himself:—

"Will the move do? Yes—I fancy so. By Jove! that was not a bad dodge of mine—turning the newspaper into a sentimental barometer wherewith to test the state of Mrs. Prince's attachment to the memory of a person whom she thought to be dead. The presence of Miss Proby will quite alter my movements with regard to Egerton Crossley. Who the devil could have fancied that she would turn up here?"

When Mr. Hamperton had been puffing at his cigar some ten minutes, a tap was heard at the door; and to his "come in," Sibylla Proby entered. He rose and bowed.

"I am glad you've come," he said, "sit down. When you left the drawing-room I suppose you said that you were going to bed!"

"I did so," answered Sibylla, without however seating herself in the chair indicated by the solicitor. "I wish to know what you have to say to me, Mr. Hamperton?" she added.

"A great deal, my dear young lady," he answered politely, at the same time putting his cigar out. "A great deal. Sit down. Pray do."

And Sibylla was constrained to sit down. "That's right," exclaimed Hamperton—"allow me to express my regret," he added, "that I do not find you looking so well, as when I saw you last!"

"But that regret is scarcely equal to your surprise at seeing me in Mr. Bryant's house, Mr. Hamperton—is it?"

"My surprise and regret were equally great," blandly answered the solicitor. "Allow me to ask you a question? As Mr. Bryant and myself entered the drawing-room, this evening, were you not speaking of me, Miss Proby?"

"I was."

"Ahem—will you be kind enough to let me know whether your conversation with Olivia

Prince had assumed a very serious tone with regard to myself?"

"It had not."

"Excuse me—possibly, owing—to the interruption caused by my entrance?"

"You are quite right, Mr. Hamperton, I dare say I should have spoken more openly, more significantly of you, if you had not appeared at the moment you did!"

"Leaving myself out of consideration, I may say how singularly fortunate for your future happiness, Miss Proby, it was that I entered at such a time!"

"My future happiness," said Sibylla, looking with astonishment at him.

"I repeat, your future happiness! If I have that of anyone at heart, it is yours! You may say that I owe you a great deal; I do not dispute the debt; but unselfish regard for you, unselfish esteem for the memory of your good father, conspire to render me especially interested in securing you, if possible, a life which, when you have come to its end, you can look back upon with feelings of unmitigated satisfaction!"

"You forget, Mr. Hamperton, that I have before heard you give utterance to very lofty sentiments, and that I have had an experience of you, which causes me to be very suspicious of you when you so do."

To this remark, Mr. Hamperton only made one of his politest bows. Then, after a moment's pause, he said—

"You will think differently, and speak differently of me when you leave this room to-night. I suppose," he added, after a pause, "you know the business which has brought me to this house?"

"I do! I was curious enough to ask Mrs. Prince what it was. She said that you came here partly on Mr. Evershed's account, (having been Dr. Kealwin's solicitor), and partly on Mr. Bryant's. I don't know much of Mr. Bryant; but what I do know of him, and what Mrs. Prince told me, carelessly enough, of the nature of your business with him, were sufficient to enable me to guess the reasons which had more particularly brought you here. Some months ago you found my father a very convenient tool

for your purposes : you have found that Mr. Bryant will be equally so !”

Again Mr. Hamperton bowed. “ Having discovered so much,” he said with very good-natured sarcasm, “ what, may I ask, is it your intention to do ?”

“ I have no wish to see another blinded and ruined, as my father was,” answered Sibylla angrily ; “ and I will expose you !”

“ Expose me ! Expose me ! Such, I am to understand, is your intention ?”

“ It is.”

“ Then why did you not expose me in Mr. Bryant’s drawing-room this evening ? You had a capital opportunity. You might have emulated Joan of Arc, and driven me ignominiously from the establishment. I venture to assert, Miss Proby, that with all your reasons for hating me, and with the capital chance you had of gratifying that animosity, you were not quite prepared to undergo my counter-charge. It is possible that you are more indifferent to my power over you than you were ; but, unless I am mistaken, you are not quite ready to hear,

or to know that others hear, all I have to say about you. But,"—and here Mr. Hamperton dropped his half angry, half sarcastic tone, and assumed in a moment the amiability of the dove,—“I have been betrayed into hastiness of temper. Concede me your forgiveness. I have no wish to place myself in hostility to you. Quite the contrary. Quite the contrary—I assure you!” After a short pause: “May I ask you whether it is your intention to let in the light upon the nature of my past connexion with your much lamented father?”

“Certainly.”

“Holding such an intention, why, then, did you visit me here?” enquired Mr. Hamperton.

“One motive was to hear what you had to say to me,—and the other motive was to let you know openly that I was your enemy!”

“My enemy! Well—I am sorry that you are. I hoped we had made a truce months ago; and I had some slight belief,—I admit it was slight,—that you would observe your terms in the condition; because an infraction on your part would necessarily cause an infraction on



mine. You surely have not forgotten what passed between us last August?"

"I have not forgotten; and you must know too, Mr. Hamperton, that the changes, which have taken place since, have emancipated me from considerations, by which I was influenced then. If I do not tell Mr. Bryant what I know of you, you may ruin him as you ruined my father!"

"Your sense of social duties is very great. But its exhibition is somewhat late in the day. It is a pity that you did not regard your filial duties, in the same light that you regard your duties to your more remote neighbour. But, can I not purchase your silence?"

"Purchase my silence? No."

"I beg your pardon,"—this very politely,—  
"I think I can. Pray don't be indignant. On Mr. Robert Evershed's account, or partly so, you consented to be silent upon your father's business transactions with me. On his account will you not be silent still?"

"I do not understand you!"

"Wait awhile—and you will fully understand

me. It is probably your impression that Mr. Evershed entertains a very sincere regard for Mrs. Prince?"

"It is not my impression."

"Quite right. He does not. He is charmed, fascinated, as the best of us are occasionally. Indeed, it seems to be Mrs. Prince's especial destiny to make every man who has the honour of her delightful acquaintance to fancy he is in love with her. There are plenty of women of this kind in the world—gifted with such perilous attractions. And now with regard to the other side. You think that Olivia is very much attached to Mr. Evershed?"

"I do."

"You are wrong, Miss Proby. She cares for him much less than he cares for her!"

"How do you know that?"

"I do know it. Never mind how I know it. It is sufficient that I do."

Sibylla looked incredulous.

"You don't believe me. But I reiterate what I before said. Mrs. Prince does not care for Mr. Evershed. When I say this, I mean that

with three words to her I could cause her gladly to relinquish her claim upon Mr. Evershed's hand. Will you believe me?"

Sibylla looked steadily into Mr. Hamperton's eyes, and said after a long pause—"I suppose I must."

Mr. Hamperton bowed. "Now, Miss Proby, for our compact! I am of course to understand that there is no alteration in your sentiments with regard to Mr. Evershed. You love him still?"

The silence of Sibylla was her answer.

"I thought so! Mark me! If I promise to separate Olivia Prince and Robert Evershed, will you consent to be silent upon what you know of me?"

Sibylla started, but said not a word.

Hamperton put the question again.

"Can you separate them?" she asked.

"I have said that I can. And in three days time I will have done it effectually. If I have not by that time effected the separation, I give you full permission to go to Mr. Bryant and say, 'James Hamperton persuaded my father to speculate, as he is persuading you, and he ruined

him—and see in me compelled to earn my livelihood as governess one effect of his fatal advice. He is an unscrupulous man, and will ruin you as he ruined my father, unless you break off all connection with him.’ I give you full permission to say this to Mr. Bryant in three days’ time, if by then the engagement between Olivia Prince and Robert Evershed is not broken off for ever.”

“By consenting to this proposal, I shall be doing wrong. I may cause Mr. Bryant’s ruin, as I—alas—helped to cause my father’s!”

“You will be doing nothing of the kind. Mr. Bryant will not be ruined. Do you consent?”

“But—but your plan of separating them may involve measures which are not justifiable!”

“Metaphorically speaking, place your hand upon your conscience, and quiet it. My plan will involve no unjustifiable measures. In accomplishing it, I shall do one of the kindest actions in my life. Again, do you consent? Robert Evershed will be free. He will know that he was never loved. What will then follow? He will remember you—he will call to mind

that he once deeply loved you—he will see you again !”

“ How can you tell that ?”

“ The probabilities, Miss Proby, allow me to assure you, are strongly in favour of such a proceeding on his part. When a man once loves a woman, though he may marry another whom he loves too, he will never be entirely indifferent to the one who first aroused his affections. I speak from experience, Miss Proby.” And Mr. Hamperton gave his breast a sentimental tap. “ You accede to my proposal ?” he added.

The bait was tempting. If Robert were free, would he not again think of her?—would not his old love for her revive in his heart once more? To win this man she had sinned once. Should she not sin again?—or was it sin? Had not Mr. Hamperton assured her that the measures he proposed taking to effect a separation between Olivia Prince and Robert Evershed were justifiable? And had he not further assured her that no danger was to be apprehended to Mr. Bryant by his business trans-

actions with the solicitor? With all her experience of Mr. Hamperton in the past, she endeavoured to justify herself becoming a party to the compact suggested by him, by believing what he said. So we drug our consciences when our passion objects to be troubled by their supervision.

"Do you hesitate?" said Mr. Hamperton; "no, that cannot be. I do not ask of you much, and I am sure you will never have cause to look back with regret if you abide by my advice. To speak with certainty on such matters is impossible; but it is surely most reasonable to believe that Robert Evershed will at once renew his past relationship with you. Miss Proby, you have it in your power to make yourself a happy woman."

"I have not been a happy woman lately," she murmured.

"I venture to prophesy that the days are not far distant when you will become one, and nobody will rejoice more than I." James Hamperton spoke with perfect truth. With all his unscrupulousness, he was sincere in wishing

Sibylla well. The hard rubbings of a very hard world had not quite rubbed out all the unselfishness in his strangely complicated nature.

"You will allow three days to pass before you say anything to Mr. Bryant prejudicial to my character?" said the solicitor.

After a little hesitation Sibylla replied—

"Yes."

"Then our compact is settled. In three days' time Olivia Prince will have given Robert Evershed to understand that she cannot be his wife. The day after to-morrow Mr. Bryant and Mrs. Prince go to London. You will hear from me on the following morning. You will know then that James Hamperton has not made you a vain promise. Good night."

"Good night."

And the woman whose god was Robert Evershed, and whose faith was her passion for him, left the room.

James Hamperton then re-lit his cigar, saying—

"By gad! a man ought to think himself

honoured by being loved by such a woman. She'd go through fire and water in behalf of the man she cared for, and, I believe, she'd face the devil himself."



## CHAPTER VI.

### AGAIN.

ON the day fixed, Mr. Bryant and Mrs. Prince went to London. As a lady who was soon about to marry, Olivia had need of making a good many purchases ; and as Mr. Bryant had some business to transact in London about the time, they could comfortably make their visit together. They had another motive also in visiting town. Georgine, who but for a ball engagement, would have returned to Messingham with her sister and Miss Proby, had fixed this day for the termination of her stay at Haystone ; and her father and sister's arrangements

were so made that they should meet in London and carry her home with them.

As Mr. Bryant and Mrs. Prince alighted on the platform of the terminus of the Great Eastern Railway, Mr. Hamperton and Mrs. Hamperton were ready to receive them. The first greetings over, Mr. Bryant alluded to his prospective movements for the day.

"I'll go and deposit the luggage at our hotel, Olivia, and then go to the City. You are going, I suppose, first to Mrs. Hamperton's?"

"Yes, certainly; Mrs. Prince is coming to ours first. My dear mamma is all expectation to see you."

This from Mrs. Hamperton; the dear mamma referred to being Mrs. Calley.

"Are you going into the City at once, Hamperton?" asked Mr. Bryant.

"No; gallantry forbids such a proceeding this morning. I shall accompany your charming daughter and my estimable wife to Bedford Square first."

"I intend to do a good deal of shopping to-day, papa," remarked Olivia, "for to-morrow

may be wet, and I hate walking or riding about London on a wet day."

"I have a suggestion," said Mr. Hamperton. "As Mrs. Prince seems desirous of shopping to-day, and as the weather promises to be fine, I say 'shop' by all means. She shall take some luncheon at our house, and then I will accompany her to the City, and meet you, Mr. Bryant, at any place you may name."

"That's capital, Mr. Hamperton," said the lady to whom these arrangements referred.

"We'll meet, then, in St. Paul's Church-yard," said Mr. Bryant.

Such were the arrangements, and for the execution of a project of Mr. Hamperton, which he had elaborated with much care and forethought, they could not have been more suitable.

Great was the satisfaction of Mrs. Calley at seeing Olivia again. Ecstatic was the old lady on her favourite's good looks. Indeed, Olivia Prince had never appeared handsomer than she had to-day. All the charms of her womanhood were in fullest flower. She looked magnificent in her glorious health, her developed

beauty. Gazing at her face, you would think that she had never known a trouble, that she could never know trouble; so proud, and yet so amiable a face, would scorn to weep or plead.

"Ah, my dear, and here you are!" cried Mrs. Calley, admiringly; "and how charming you look. And so you've come up to buy lots of things, as ladies do when they are going to marry. But why didn't Robert come with you?"

"What reason had he to come? Men—at least, young men—don't like to drag from shop to shop; and besides, he's busy at Langbourne attending to some alterations which are being made at the Hall."

"You are very happy?"

"Of course I am, Mrs. Calley."

"You look beautiful! You'll make a splendid Mrs. Robert Evershed, of Langbourne Hall. That place hasn't, I fancy, been a merry one for a good many years. It must be your task to make it so, when you are mistress there—Mrs. Robert Evershed."

Mr. Hamperton, who happened to hear these words, turned away his head, and smiled.

"But sit down, and have some luncheon," exclaimed Mrs. Calley, dragging Olivia into a chair. "You couldn't have made a better choice of a husband than you have. Doctor Kealwin, after all, disposed of his money to some good purpose."

And the old lady, in her delight at knowing that Olivia was to be the wife of one whom she regarded with especial favour, from the fact of the name he bore, and the position in the county which his newly-acquired wealth would enable him to obtain, and that Olivia had never looked more beautiful or seemed more happy, was able to treat her daughter's husband with an amount of civility which was most unusual in her intercourse with him.

Luncheon over, Mr. Hamperton said—

"I think it is time we should be going, Mrs. Prince; Mr. Bryant will be expecting us in St. Paul's Churchyard."

And in a few minutes' time Mr. Hamperton and Mrs. Prince left the house in a cab. Before getting into it the solicitor had a few whispered words with the driver, unseen by his wife and Mrs. Calley.

"On such an occasion as the present," said Mr. Hamperton, turning to his beautiful companion, "you must feel an unusual amount of happiness."

"Of course," she answered; "one does not make preparations for becoming mistress of a place like Langbourne Hall in low spirits."

And then the happy, worldly woman laughed merrily.

"Langbourne Hall, though dull," said Mr. Hamperton, "may be transformed into a very delightful spot."

"Indeed it may; and I mean to exert my efforts in effecting the transformation. It looks as if it had a lugubrious story to tell yet; but all that will soon be changed. I abhor dull places; and if, when I live there, Langbourne Hall is dull, it won't be through any fault of mine."

It was evident to Mr. Hamperton, from every word that Olivia Prince uttered, that she looked forward to becoming the mistress of Langbourne Hall with all worldly eagerness and pleasure.

"Can you bear a surprise, Mrs. Prince?"

asked her companion in an unusually solemn manner, when the two had been riding together for some minutes.

“A surprise!—Of what kind?”

“Of a pleasurable kind.”

“Of course I can.”

“A surprise may be pleasurable and yet so great that a preparation is needed,” remarked James Hamperton; “and as that which I have in store for you is a very great one, I have thought it necessary to prepare you for it, by giving you a little notice of its advent.”

“How very seriously you talk.”

“If so, it is because I am managing a matter of an essentially serious nature.”

“Mr. Hamperton, how enigmatical you are. I thought I was only accompanying you to the City to meet papa. I had no idea that you——”

“Had another subject in view at the same time,” interrupted James Hamperton; “perhaps not. Again I ask you, are you able to bear a great surprise?”

“Certainly I am,” answered Olivia, indif-

ferently. "You must know enough of me, Mr. Hamperton, to be aware that my nature is not very emotional, and that I don't go into hysterics at trifles."

"Quite so."

Mrs. Prince laughed, and said,—

"What is this surprise?"

Glancing round at his companion before he answered her, Mr. Hamperton observed, with some amount of dissatisfaction, that her proud, handsome, good-natured face looked marvelously indifferent. What, after all, if his cunningly-devised scheme should fail?

"One question, Mrs. Prince. You may think it a strange one until you know all; you may indeed accuse me of rudeness in putting it. But, before you so accuse me, I venture to hint that my age (alas! I'm fifty-five, and look older than that) excuses it. Ahem—are you greatly attached to my friend Mr. Evershed?"

"What a question!" laughed Olivia. "Seeing that I am shortly going to marry him, you may conclude that——"

"——You regard him," interrupted Mr.



Hamperton, quickly, "as a good many other ladies regard their *fiancés*—with a compound of moderate esteem and mild regard!"

"Mr. Hamperton!" she expostulated.

"I should not have spoken as I have, had I not had your interest at heart," answered the solicitor.

"What a puzzling man you are!"

Mr. Hamperton put his head out of the cab, and turned his eye upward, as if to see the name of the street which the cab had reached, and then he said,—

"We shall stop in a few minutes."

"Stop! But we are not at St. Paul's Churchyard!"

"True. We stop before then."

"This stopping—I can't understand it!"

"You will before long; and if I am not greatly mistaken, it will render a good deal of your shopping unnecessary. I presume that a good many of the things you intend purchasing are destined for Langbourne Hall?"

"They certainly are."

"Should you be very much grieved if you never became mistress of that—I must say—rather dull habitation?"

"Of course I should. You must know that very well, Mr. Hamperton!"

There was a pause, during which the cab was heard rattling along rather uncertainly, as if the driver was about to stop, but was not quite sure of the number of the street where he was to draw up his vehicle.

Looking very earnestly at his companion, Mr. Hamperton said:—

"Robert Evershed is not the only one whom you have loved?"

Her face changed.

"How—how do you know?"

"Enough that I know what I know.—Stop!" This to the cabman. The cab quickly drew up.

With a half frightened look, Mrs. Prince said,—

"What is the meaning of this?"

"You will know directly," was Hamperton's answer; "perhaps you will get out here."

A respectable looking woman had already

appeared at the door of the house by which the cab was standing, and at a sign from the solicitor, she advanced to the vehicle, to assist Mrs. Prince in her descent.

“You must explain this,” said Olivia, before she moved from her seat.

Mr. Hamperton gave an oracular answer :—

“If I said that the dead had come to life again, I might sufficiently explain my meaning to you ; but I should violate the truth. By saying that one whom you thought dead is living, I explain my meaning, and at the same time do no dishonour to truth !”

This same morning Egerton Crossley left his rooms in Piccadilly, and jumping into a hansom, was driven to the house where George Hamperton was lying. When he parted from the invalid on the previous day, he saw that he was much worse, and apprehended, from various unmistakable symptoms, that his end was not far distant. George had begged him on the previous day to come early, which he promised to do ; and this morning he received a short note from

James Hamperton, requesting him to be with his brother, if possible, about mid-day. Egerton Crossley only supposed that Mr. Hamperton was interested in his brother: he had no suspicion that the solicitor had another motive in his request. Upon his arrival he found that George Hamperton was worse, the symptoms having increased in violence. It seemed very unlikely that he would live many days longer.

"I thought—I thought I should have died this morning," said the sick man, feebly; "and I have so much to say before I die. You do not know all about me yet."

"But you do not despair now, do you? The dark clouds have all passed away?"

"In a measure; but there are moments when I fear still—when I look back upon my past life with bitter anguish. It has been bad! But, oh, God! if a man can lay his ruin at another man's hands, I can lay mine. But for one man I should not have been the outcast I am!"

"Do not think of the past," urged Crossley, kindly; "but to be sure that however bad it was,

it is to be forgiven. And it is too late for you to blame anyone now."

"Too late—too late. Yes; it is too late. Before I die there is one person whom I should much like to see; and I should like to say what I have to say before her—if possible. She was very kind to me once; and I know more of her than many do."

"Who is she?"

"Her name is Legh, and she lives in the country. I have been thinking about her for a long time, and wondering whether it was not my duty to confess what I knew about her, and to tell her what I have done. She was the first who spoke hopefully to me for many years—who spoke as you have done. For this, and for other reasons, I should like—very much—like to see her again. I wonder whether it is possible?"

"Can I communicate to her?" asked Crossley.

"You, or my brother can. I will ask him whether he has any objections to my seeing her, and telling her all. When I die, I should like to die with her near me."

"You have something to say about her that's not generally known, and which you think ought to be known. Am I to understand this as your meaning?"

"Partly so—partly so. Hark! I can hear a cab drawing up. It is my brother, perhaps? He is a good deal later to-day than usual!"

And here was James Hamperton, who, after a nod to his brother, turned to the Major, and said:

"A few words spoken by you to George some days ago, the evening before I left town, had a very striking significance for me. I made no remark then: thinking it was uncalled for. You have done my brother a service—a great service; and I wish to do you one."

The Major regarded the speaker with unfeigned surprise.

"I see you are astonished," was Mr. Hamperton's answer to this look. "Go down stairs—turn into the first room on the right, and you will see somebody you didn't expect to see half an hour ago."

Major Crossley looked from the sick man

lying on the bed to the strong man standing at its side, in great perplexity.

“Go—but first make up your mind to receive the most agreeable shock of surprise that you ever received in your life.”

Major Crossley said nothing, but went.

Entering the room to which he had been directed by James Hamperton, Major Crossley saw there a very handsomely dressed woman, with her back turned towards him. The words spoken by the solicitor had not awakened the faintest suspicion as to whom he was to meet. He left James Hamperton, in profound perplexity: he entered the room, his perplexity undiminished.

Suddenly the lady turned towards him, and Olivia Prince and Egerton Crossley met again! The beautiful worldly woman's face became wonderfully pale. He who entered the room (notwithstanding the significance of Hamperton's words) was the last person she expected to see on earth. She who was standing there was the last person he had dared to hope to meet again.

Proud, ambitious, worldly, as she was, her

pride, her ambition, her worldliness offered no barrier to her earnest woman's love. She forgot what her mission to London was. She forgot the object upon which she was bent, when in her prosecution of it, she was stopped and brought face to face with one whom she had loved and believed to be dead.

"Oh, Egerton!" she cried, in surprise—in humiliation—in joy—that she had met him again.

He took her in his arms; the greatness of his astonishment at this re-meeting, was, after its first sharp thrill, soon swallowed up in the completeness of his happiness.

James Hamperton descended the stairs some minutes afterwards, congratulating himself on the execution of his device. This sudden, unexpected introduction of Olivia to Egerton Crossley would be more effectual in securing the object he had in view, than if he had availed himself of the common-place expedient of telling Major Crossley that he knew where Mrs. Prince was living, and of informing Olivia that she was mistaken in her suspicions that the man, whom



she had earnestly loved, was dead. This *coup-de-théâtre* was moreover especially agreeable to his character and temperament.

When he reached the room in which Olivia Prince and Egerton Crossley were, he found the door shut. Applying his eye to the key-hole, he witnessed a gratifying scene.

"All right! Robert Evershed is free for Sibylla now," he said as he put his finger significantly to the side of his nose.

END OF THE FIFTH BOOK.

## BOOK THE SIXTH.

### "WINDING UP."

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#### CHAPTER I.

##### "LOVE'S SACRIFICE."

LESTER TEMPLE was sitting at his piano playing. A little table was not far from his side, on which lay some ruled MS. music paper, and from time to time he would turn from the instrument to the table at his side, and write down the results of his extemporising. Blanche Legh was with him, and she was also writing: his manuscript was music, hers was only a letter.

She was looking very ill and pale; the walk in the soaking rain some days ago had been fruitful of bad results. She had been obliged

to keep her bed for some time, and this was only the second day that she had been down stairs. Illness alone is a bad companion enough, but illness associated with bitter trouble leaves sorrowful traces in the figure and the face. Petite's slight frame seemed wonderfully thin; her large eyes had a painful, weary look; and her countenance, pale always, was quite colourless now. In contrast to her, Lester Temple looked very well and happy. It was his nature to be easy, and careless, and light-hearted; troubles and disappointments he has had, as this book has shewn, but he could face the inevitable, after the first cry of pain was over, with a pleasantly cheerful resignation. When, months ago, to his great surprise, he found that his happy plan of life was not to be realized, but that he must put his shoulder to the wheel of work, he submitted with quite a charming indifference to the decrees of fate; and now, when he felt that he had lost all hope of winning Georgine Bryant, and there was a very loving wife waiting for him in the person of Miss Legh, he did his best to be contented.

When Blanche had written her letter and placed it in an envelope, she touched the bell, and a servant entered.

"Let this be sent to Mr. Graham for Miss Bryant," she said.

"What are you writing to Miss Bryant about?" asked Lester, turning round from the piano.

"I have written to ask her to come here this afternoon if she can : she is going to leave to-morrow, or the next day."

"To ask her to come here?" mused Lester.

"Yes," answered Blanche, slowly ; "I have something I very much wish to say to her."

"Something about——" but he failed to guess, and with the expression of his face a little changed, he turned towards the piano again. He had not seen Georgine since that meeting in Mr. Graham's drawing-room, and having accepted his final fate there, and resigned himself to it, he thought that he could not see too little of her.

"Shall you be very long before you have done composing?" asked Petite.

"Oh, dear me, little one, if you have anything to say to me, I'll shut up the piano now."

"I can wait," she said; and there was something in the tone in which she spoke that caused Lester to turn quickly round, and look at her very wistfully. Her sad and sick face, which he had only noticed carelessly before, struck him painfully now.

"Why, Petite, dear," he said, taking her hand, "you do look ill indeed!"

"He has scarcely noticed it before," thought Petite, with a sinking pain in her heart, but she did not openly reproach him. She only said—

"I don't feel well."

"This has all come of your going out after your old women that miserably wet day. I wish the old women were at Hanover."

Thus spoke Lester Temple with a very great indignation.

Petite faintly smiled.

"You are more than ill—you are unhappy,"

said Lester, with very sincere pity, but not for a moment guessing what the cause of her unhappiness might be.

"I shall not be so long," she made answer.

"And are you, Lester, perfectly contented?"

"I?—yes."

"No,—no,—you are not," cried Blanche, eagerly; "you are not contented. I am the barrier in the way of your happiness."

"Nonsense!"

"Lester—I know all—you love Georgine Bryant more than you love me. Oh, how I wish I had been aware of this before!"

"Blanche, who has told you this?"

"Never mind who told me. It is true, is it not? I don't blame you—I don't blame you—I only wish to see you happy—to help you to be happy if I can."

"Georgine has not told you this herself?" said Lester.

"No, indeed, she has not. Don't judge her so ungenerously as to think that, Lester. You loved her when you lived at Messingham Priory; you told her so, and she refused you. I can

guess this from what she said to me before she knew that I was engaged to you: the meaning of so much which she told me I can now understand, but this was before she knew that I had any claim upon you. Since then she has made no allusion to what passed between us, when you so unexpectedly returned, and came into the room where we were. Georgine was willing to generously sacrifice herself for me, and now I wish to do her a kindness in return."

"But Blanche, how do you know all this?" asked Lester, his head bent down to the ground.

"Your interview with Georgine on the day of the children's *fête* had a witness—not an intentional witness, I believe—and from her I learned it."

"Who was she?"

"Sibylla Proby. I was obliged, hard as it was, to believe her. You do not deny it, Lester?"

"You must not think that I do not love you, Petite," he cried, eagerly; "I do, most dearly; how could I do otherwise, so good, so self-

sacrificing as you have always been to me?—  
And as my wife, I shall love you to the end."

"I can never be your wife."

"Blanche!"

"Never," she said, solemnly; "I could not marry you if I thought you had ever loved any one more than you loved me. I could not—I would rather die first."

"Oh, Petite!"

"I mean to release you from your promise—to remit all claim that I have on you. Since I have been lying ill upstairs, I have fully resolved to do this. You will be the happier, Lester, and I shall be the happier. The letter which I wrote to Georgine will bring her here, and I will place her hand in yours, and pray for you. Nothing that you can say will shake my determination."

"How much better and worthier you are than I am, Petite," cried Lester who was much moved. "I wish——"

"You can wish for no happier lot for yourself than I wish for you. Oh do not—do not think I blame you. I cannot wonder that you loved



Georgine Bryant. I loved her from the first, and can I cease to do so, because she loves you?"

Georgine Bryant was not long before she made her appearance, explaining her arrival so soon after the dispatch of the note thus :—

"I was out walking, Blanche, when I met your servant with the note ; and so I came on here at once." This was spoken when Petite went forward to meet her in the Hall. Suddenly she was aware that she had entered a room where Lester Temple was standing ; and a look of painful surprise came into her face.

"I and Lester," said Petite, in a singularly quiet manner, "were only speaking of you as you entered. I have asked you to come here for a special purpose, dear Georgine. I know all, and I want to make things right!"

"Blanche," cried Georgine—"what do you mean?"

"I know all, dear Georgine," she repeated. "I know that you have a claim on Lester Temple prior to mine—that he told you he loved you, first ; I am sure he loves you still ; and I think that you too love him still!"

Georgine Bryant's face, covered with blushes, was bent downwards.

"I have told Lester," Petite went on, "what I intend to do; and I am now going to tell you. Dear Georgine, do not think that I regard you at all enviously, and that when I give you what I thought was mine for ever, I do so with any angry feelings."

"Blanche, dear," was all that Georgine could say. Petite took her hand, and gazing inquiringly into her face said:—

"You love him—do you not?"

Answer blushing face. Answer throbbing heart.

"And now," Petite said very earnestly, but very calmly, as she placed the two hands together:—

"I pray that you may both be very, very happy—that neither of you may have cause to regret what I have done!"

She would have glided from the room, but for the loud ringing of the bell—and the almost simultaneously opening of the front door

and the sound of a voice. It was a voice which both Lester and Georgine recognised. The next moment the door of the room was opened, and Mrs. Temple, and Mr. Hamperton appeared. Mr. Hamperton's eyes fell immediately upon Petite.

"I want Miss Legh to come to London with me at once," said he. And then Mr. Hamperton entered more fully into his mission. A poor man whom she had once assisted was on the point of death, and he had something to communicate, which it was necessary that she should hear. Mr. Hamperton brought a letter from Mrs. Prince, as a certificate of the honesty of his purposes, if such a thing were needed, addressed to Lester, who could, of course, identify her writing at once. The letter also arranged for Blanche Legh's staying in town, with Mrs. Prince that night, as it would be inconvenient or impossible for her to return to the country.

"You are doubtless in possession," said Mr. Hamperton, turning to Mrs. Temple; "of many particulars of this young lady's birth?" pointing to Blanche Legh.

"I am of many, but there is much that I should like to know—much that at one time I feared I never should know."

"All that can be told will be told to Miss Legh by the person to whose bedside I am about to lead her. From a few words dropped by him, I can infer that, speaking with all consideration of so delicate a matter, you need not apprehend that the disclosure will be, in one sense, very painful. On the contrary, all persons interested in the young lady will be gratified by the nature of the communication which this person wishes to make."

Then Mr. Hamperton produced his watch, glanced at it, and said:—

"A train leaves for London in a half-an-hour's time. If Miss Legh has any preparations to make, it is time that she should make them."

Petite's preparations were soon made; and, escorted by Mr. Hamperton, she left the house.

Mrs. Temple, Lester, and Georgine, watched her depart, with a painful look in their eyes.

"She is not well," said Mrs. Temple, who

had become aware of what had happened in the room, before she entered with Mr. Hamperton. "She is not well, and,"—looking fixedly at Georgine; "she is not happy. You have taken her place in my son's heart; have you not?"

"She relinquished Lester for me," said Georgine, blushing; "and I——"

"Well, well," answered Mrs. Temple, in a vexed tone of voice; "it is not for me to interfere. Lester, you have acted fairly with Petite—you did not take the initiative in this matter?"

"No, mother, no. I can assure you I did not."

"I am very glad of that! Blanche Legh has a true and loving heart—how true, how loving, you, Lester, may never know!"

She was on her way to London now, and James Hamperton, guessing not that she who sat before him in the carriage would form one link in the chain from whose thrall he was not destined to emancipate himself, chatted to her with all his usual animation.

## CHAPTER II.

### A STORY OF THE PAST.

A DARK November afternoon drew to its close, and the lights in long lines shot up quickly in the streets of London. Avoiding the noisier thoroughfares, a woman, closely veiled, threaded a series of streets, and at last found herself in a quiet, decorous thoroughfare in Bloomsbury, where she stopped before a certain house, and glanced up wistfully towards the windows. Then she hurried on again, stopped to look back, and finally planted herself in a shady spot at the corner. Opposite her, stood a public house, and from it a broad, steady ray of light fell across the street.

Very few passengers were abroad—not once had a cab rattled by her. She was nervous in all her movements ; and it was evident that she was employed upon some work which was perfectly new to her. Again and again—always drawing her veil tightly around her face, she glanced at one particular house. She saw that nobody entered—she saw that nobody came out. There was a light in only one window, and occasionally she could see the shadow of a person moving across it. She kept her place for a quarter of an hour, or twenty minutes. Then a cab was heard approaching. It was coming at a rapid pace towards the street. It turned round the corner, passing through the broad, bright ray of gas light streaming from the public house ; and for one quick moment the occupants of the vehicle were plainly discernible. One was James Hamper-ton ; the other was a lady, unknown to the watcher in the street. She turned, saw the cab draw up at the door of the house which she had regarded very attentively, and saw the persons descend and enter. Then the cab leisurely drove away.

A fierce pang of jealousy had torn the woman's heart, as her eye fell upon Mr. Hamperton; for she was his wife. Goaded by her mother, whose repeated insinuations and suggestions told at last she had become suspicious of her husband, and had watched his movements, or caused others to watch them, under a miserable fear that she would discover Mrs. Calley's insinuations had some groundwork, in fact. If Mr. Hamperton were unusually amiable, this amiability was assumed, the more to hood-wink her. If he professed to be under the necessity of devoting a longer time to his business than heretofore, it was only that he might have time for pleasures in which his wife could not participate. If it so chanced that he forgot to treat her with the consideration and carefulness which had hitherto characterized his treatment of this lady, it was because his mind was occupied by the thoughts of another, or of others. Mr. Hamperton had had his hands full lately, or he would have seen that the danger to him was greater than it appeared. He knew that he was occasionally watched, but he was not aware that his wife had become so bit-



terly jealous. But for knowing that she was a gossip, and that her mother, the inquisitive Mrs. Calley, would turn the little lady inside out, he would have told her the nature of the business which so often carried him to the house in that quiet Bloomsbury Street, and explained to her the history of the unfortunate man there lying. It was necessary however that the secret should only be communicated to those who had a discretion which Jane Hamperton did not possess. The privacy of his movements led his wife, duly prompted by her mother, and urged by a jealousy which though undemonstrative was always latent, to fear that he had a lover; and her now unreasonably excited imagination had located this lover in the house where her husband's brother was lying on a bed from which there was small probability of his ever rising.

When Mrs. Hamperton had watched her husband enter the house, she hurried home, sobbing bitterly, and upbraiding a very innocent gentleman. That Mr. Hamperton's morality was more lax than his profession, the chronicler of his life, who directed his inquiries into certain

not generally known episodes, might possibly discover; but it was destined that Mrs. Hamperton was to bring her husband to book, and to grief, upon a charge which a few words should blow to the winds.

“Oh, you faithless — faithless man!” she murmured. “Oh, you faithless — faithless man! And I have so loved you, and obeyed you in everything! I’ve been patient and uncomplaining, and this is the way you treat me. Oh, you wicked man! Oh, you wicked man! From this day forward, I shall never have a moment’s peace!” And the tears came quicker than ever, Mrs. Hamperton drawing the veil tighter over her face, and hurrying on.

A group stood around a bed upon which a man lay, so ghastly pale of face, so weak in his voice, so feeble in his movements, that all who looked upon him knew that death was coming to him fast. Of this group were Egerton Crossley, Olivia Prince, James Hamperton, and Blanche Legh. Of all those who stood around the bed, Blanche Legh was the one to whom

the man, there lying, looked with most interest.

"Your face is like hers," he said. "Very—very much—like hers! I am glad you have come: it was kind—very kind of you."

Knowing that it was the man's wish to say a good deal, and that, unsupported, he would be unable to do so, Egerton Crossley left the bedside, and procured him some stimulant. This, taken—his eyes grew brighter, and his voice stronger.

"I have much to say,"—he went on—"much that concerns you. I hope I shall say nothing that can give you offence; for you were once kind to me, when I was an outcast and an invalid; and you are the daughter of one whom I once loved very dearly."

Olivia Prince, who was standing by the side of Blanche, took her hand, as though to re-assure her. "Do not be frightened. This, I know, is a trial for you."

"No—no; it's not. I am stronger than you think; and I have seen many beds, like this, before."

Looking wistfully at her, the man said:

"You do not seem so well as when I saw you last. You are paler."

"I have been ill. I am not quite well now. You say that what you have to tell me concerns me?"

"Yes; it concerns you much. I feel that I am about to die; and that I ought to tell all I know of the past—your past and mine." Addressing his brother—"Take down some of my statements on paper. I have such a little while to live, that, on my own account, I need have no secrets any longer."

James Hamperton seated himself at the bedside, having brought a small table there, with writing materials upon it.

"Do not waste your strength by unnecessary talking," said Egerton Crossley, kindly to the man. "What you have to say, begin to say at once."

"I must begin at the beginning," said George Hamperton. "I must go back to more than twenty years ago. I was then a commercial traveller for the firm of Gresham, Shirley, and Gordon. I was a favourite of Mr. Gresham,

and I had not been connected with the firm long before he introduced me to his family, living at Clapham. They were very kind to me, and I was often invited to Clapham, to spend my Sundays. There I met, and I fell in love with the governess of Mr. Gresham's children. Her name was Cecile Marescôt. She was a young French gentlewoman ; the kindest, the gentlest creature that ever lived, and I loved her as a man who has never loved before loves, when he is no longer a boy, and knows that the passion he has conceived is the passion of a life. It was a long time before I breathed a word of love to Cecile Marescôt. I was a shy man ; and those who disliked me said that I was sullen. I dare say I was. I know I had none of the graces and accomplishments of other young men of my age. Cecile was very beautiful—very clever—very kind ; and, to tell the truth, I was fearful that she might not care for the attachment of such a person as myself. It is not difficult to guess how such a fear acted upon one of my temperament. Well, I kept my secret in my own bosom, awaiting the time when I could

disclose it. Cecile was very gracious and kind to me; and I treasured up, in my memory, her acts of kindness and graciousness with a miser's avaricious carefulness. Great was my astonishment one day, when visiting Mr. Gresham's house, at Clapham, to find there two or three young men, whom I knew very well. Their names were Temple, Kealwin, and Saunderson. They were all young doctors; and I had made their acquaintance as young men do make the acquaintance of young men in London. If I had found them paying any great attention to Cecile Marescôt, I should have been furiously jealous. To my great satisfaction, their attention was chiefly paid to the Miss Greshams. I must make an observation in favour of Temple. He was already married, and his manner to everyone present was only that of a well-behaved man of the world. He was kind and attentive to Cecile Marescôt; and this was owing to his having known her parents, then dead, in France. Saunderson said but little to her, and Kealwin said nothing. I met them here again and again. Sometimes alto-

gether, and sometimes but one of them. I had seen nothing in their conduct to make me jealous or suspicious that any of them might be in love with Cecile. Nevertheless, there were moments when I was uneasy, and it would have been hard for me to explain my uneasiness. Kealwin was the first to discover my attachment to Cecile Marescôt, and he rallied me because I did not ask her to become my wife. He was one of the most plausible and the most agreeable of men, and his manners made him a friend everywhere.

“ He seemed so open, so easy, so incapable of deceit. After having rallied me for being so slow in declaring my love for Cecile Marescôt, he said that he would play a friend’s part for me, and give her to understand what I was too diffident to tell her myself. I believed in him, and I thanked him. Shortly afterwards I had to leave town ; and when I returned I found that Cecile had left Mr. Gresham, and that nobody knew whither she had gone. It happened that both Kealwin and Saunderson had left town too. I could not suspect that the former had any-

thing to do with her departure ; and I knew not what to think about Saunderson for some time. At last, when I had talked the matter over with Temple, who sincerely sympathised with me, and had guessed how matters stood with regard to Cecile and myself, I came to the conclusion that she had fled with Saunderson. He had shown her some little attention of late ; and from his known character, I feared that he might have persuaded her to fly with him. Such was the general opinion for months. I was in despair—so suddenly had my hopes been shattered. Until Cecile was thus lost to me, I never realized the intensity of my love for her. She had been my hope, my faith—the one object of my life. In losing her I had lost all care for life : I was indifferent whither I drifted—what I did. Slowly, very slowly, the habit of intoxication made me its slave. My affairs became embarrassed. Trusted implicitly by the firm I served, it was no difficult matter for me to benefit myself at their expense ; and intending to set matters right, one day I forged their name.

“Months and months passed by, and my



crime was undetected. In the meantime, I made a strange discovery. Business carried me down into the county of Durham, and while staying at a small village inn there, I found that I had all along been wrong in my surmises, and that the man who had wronged me was not Saunderson. Some parish officials were talking at the inn one evening of parochial matters ; and the marriage register book, which some solicitor in gross violation of rules had removed from the safe keeping of the church chest, became the subject of conversation. His motive was canvassed, and one of the speakers at last suggested—quite erroneously as it was afterwards discovered—that he might be interested in some people, with queer names, quite strangers to the place, who were married at the church some months since, and who had since disappeared. What caused me to listen with additional interest when I heard these remarks, I know not. I did listen with interest, and asked the names of the persons whose marriage was the subject of conversation. To my utter astonishment I was informed that their names were curious : one English and the

other French. The following day I visited the solicitor's office, and discovered the names of Kealwin and Marescôt in the marriage register. As to the identity of the hand-writing, there could be no mistake. George Dampier Kealwin had made Cecile Marescôt his wife. Though he had been faithless to me, he had not yet been faithless to his wife. It was my lot, however, afterwards, to discover that he was as untrue to her as he was to myself. I could without difficulty guess his manner of proceeding. In pretending to advocate my cause with Cecile, he had in reality advocated his own, and undermined me in her favour. His quiet, unemotional manner whilst in her presence was evidently assumed that he might the better carry out his plan ; and I do not for the moment doubt that in the execution of his object, he made such arrangements, that by the simultaneous departure of himself and Saunderson from London, suspicion should fall rather upon Saunderson than upon himself. He was successful——”

Here he ceased a moment. The narration tried him. His brother spoke.

“What was the name of the place where you discovered that George Dampier Kealwin was married to Cecile Marescôt. It may be necessary (glancing as he said this at Blanche) to refer to the marriage register of this place.”

“Paisley Down,” answered the sick man. “In the marriage register of Paisley Down Church you will find a certificate of the marriage.”

James Hamperton carefully wrote the name of the place down ; and signed to his brother to go on.

Fixing his eyes steadily upon Blanche Legh, George Hamperton said :—“From what I have already told you, and from my desiring you more particularly to hear my statement, you will guess what one fact is that I have to relate. I have no wish to pain you : far, far from that ; I have too great a regard for the memory of her who was your mother to think of you otherwise than very kindly ; and when I call to mind that it was you, who, after I had been an outcast from my country for years, spoke gently to me, and encouraged me to hope against hope, I can only

think in my better moments that you were led to cross my path by the hand of Heaven! You will guess, I say, one fact that I have to relate. I may as well relate it now—though I have yet more to tell. Your father was George Dampier Kealwin. Your mother was his wife, once Cecile Marescôt—his wife, I say. Of that I have no doubt! Of that you need have no fear.”

Blanche, so ignorant of her past history, took the sick man's hand and pressed it: the while looking at him with an intense, eager gaze.

George Hamperton resumed:—“Before I could take any steps for making known the discovery of Kealwin's marriage to Cecile Marescôt, which had been performed in this out-of-the-way place, for concealment, I was obliged to leave England on business for the firm. My journey took me to several places in France; and it took me to the village where she had died—died when her child was born. When I arrived at the village, the gossips of the little place were still occupied by her story. She had come there alone—but she was in the habit of

telling those who had any curiosity about her—and the circumstances of her arrival were such as to give rise to it—that her husband would soon join her. She took up her residence at a quiet auberge; and was soon seized with illness. A child was born. At this time, I was informed some English people, a lady and a gentleman, evidently on a tour of pleasure, came to stay at the same inn. The gentleman, it appeared, was a medical man, and was useful in giving advice to the sick lady whom, to his astonishment, he discovered, when first introduced to her, that he knew. After her death no husband came. And, what was still more startling, she had received no letters from any one during her illness at the auberge. As the mother was dead, the child was the first consideration; and the English medical gentleman, who had been so much interested in the lady, consulted with the *curé* of the village, as to the best measures for procuring for it that kindness and care of which it stood in so much need. The *curé* had various suggestions; but none of these were quite satisfactory to the Englishman; and at

last, he and his wife offered to take charge of the child, and carry it to England with him. His respectability was so unquestionable that the *cure* readily fell in with this proposal. In a day or two he and his wife left, with the child in their possession. Such were the particulars of a story which was engaging the attention of these villagers when I took up my stay amongst them. I heard these particulars without at all guessing to whom they referred. When the country-folks entered the little auberge in the morning they were sure to put some questions about the dead lady? Had her husband come? Had any further strange thing happened? It was so at night. Poor thing her name was even unknown, for the English gentleman had refused to give any information, or had not known what it was, after her marriage. Everything pointed to the fact of the dead lady having refused to mention her real name even to one who was unmistakably her friend. On the last evening of my stay at the auberge, while the same story was the theme of conversation, a little likeness was being handed about from one

to another. It was politely placed in my hand. With a cry of horror, I recognised the portrait of Cecile. She had been stolen from me, and the man who stole her, had basely deserted her in her deepest trouble. The next day I left for Paris. I had not been there half-an-hour before I was arrested by an English detective. My forgery had been detected, skilfully as it had been performed. I was a ruined—blasted man, and I laid my ruin at Dampier Kealwin's door. Accumulated miseries confused and overwhelmed me. I had to defend myself and to right another ; but I was too brokep, too crushed, to be able to do either with any spirit. The passion—the one terrible passion that seemed to give me strength, was hatred of the man who, in robbing me of my hope, had caused me to be careless of what I did, or whither I went, and who had brought me to my present degradation ? My trial soon came on. During the interval between that and my arrest I had time only for my own interests. My legal advisers affected to see that there were good grounds for my defence, and I was incessantly occupied with them. To my

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horror I was found guilty; the fact of my occupying a confidential position in the firm only aggravated my guilt; and I was transported for life!"

He ceased speaking; and a great sob burst from the lips of Blanche Legh.

"I had not expected my terrible fate"—he went on, "the awfulness of its nature was too much for my shattered nerves. For days under the paralysing shock, I was nearly senseless. I could take no measures for making known a discovery, which I was in all duty bound to do. My crime had separated me from most of my friends; and when I was sufficiently recovered for taking the necessary steps for exposing Kealwin, I had to leave England as a transport. The truth was never known: the parentage of Blanche Legh was a secret to all but myself. You have taken down the chief particulars of what I have been telling you," he added, speaking to his brother.

"I have."

"I have not told all," the sick man went on again, his face becoming paler. "I have not told



all. But, oh my God !—as I must soon die, I will conceal nothing—nothing. During all my long years of transportation, I never forgot to hate George Dampier Kealwin. I never forgot that but for him I should have been a happy, and an honest man. Well . . . I escaped at last. I came to England. I sought out a brother who had always been kind to me, who had done his best for me during my trial, but to whom I had not disclosed the particulars of Kealwin's marriage to Cecile Marescôt, because I knew that he was a friend of Kealwin's, and because I feared that Kealwin might have used his influence,—for his influence over every one that came near him was great,—to keep my brother silent. My efforts to find this brother were for a long time unsuccessful. But strange to say, I had not been in England long before I saw the man who was my enemy. He was well, and happy. I was a miserable outcast. I had neither home nor friends. When I saw him, he was standing close to her who was his daughter ; and he did not know her parentage. I was exhausted and ill at the time. When worn out by fatigue

and excitement, I fell down senseless, it was the daughter of Cecile Marescôt who stooped kindly over me—when I became helpless and was near to death, it was the daughter of Cecile Marescôt who gave me a nurse's kindly care, a nurse's kindly sympathy!"

At these words Blanche Legh bowed her head over the bed. Olivia Prince pressed closer to her side, and whispered to her to bear up.

George Hamperton did not speak for some time. All the watchers by the bed-side regarded him fixedly: and there was a strange silence in the room.

At last, he went on,—addressing himself particularly to Blanche Legh.

"When I knew that you were living with one whose name was Temple, I recalled the names of those who became the guardians of Cecile's child. I had no doubt in my mind who you were. Your striking likeness to Cecile Marescôt—your age—your having come from France,—for so my enquiries at the time assured me that you had, only a few weeks before I was tried for forgery, were facts which pointed unerringly to

the certainty of your being the daughter of one whom I had loved so passionately. Dying, I wish you to know this. Dying, I wish you to know more. Give—give me some more of that,” he added, looking at Egerton Crossley, and pointing to the glass which contained the brandy. Crossley obeyed him.

“When I saw Dampier Kealwin again,” said George Hamperton, “again, after all those years, I felt my old hatred of him arise in my heart as intensely as ever. But for him—oh, but for him, what might not I have been? After the first quick glance at him, I did not see him for months. What I did during those months I have already told my brother; and there is no need for me to say more now. I worked occasionally upon any labour which my feeble health would allow me to undertake; and when I could find any leisure, I tried to find out his residence. I was a long time before I could do so; and when I was so far successful, he was not at home. We met at last; but—it was not until—not until”—the man stopped a moment—shuddered—and then turning his eyes painfully

towards Blanche, went on—"not until I and the man I hated had crossed each other's path again."

James Hamperton, who was still taking notes, looked anxiously towards Petite; and Olivia Prince, who knew the fate of Doctor Kealwin, and half guessed what was coming, clasped Blanche, who was shuddering, tightly by the hand.

Once more there was a dead pause in the room. The words of the sick man broke it.

"One day I heard that if I wished to see my brother, or to have any communication with him, I should apply to Doctor Kealwin's, whither he was gone. When this message was left for me, he did not know who was enquiring for him. I went to Doctor Kealwin's—I only saw Doctor Kealwin. I——"

Egerton Crossley understood the cause of the hesitation, and gave George Hamperton the stimulant, saying in a kind voice—

"Confess—confess all!"

"I am going to do so—I am going to do so."

My life will be such a short one here, that I need not be careful about saying anything which may endanger it. I found George Dampier Kealwin alone. It was at night. He had had a party, I think. The wine still stood on the table. He looked as he used to look years ago—happy, easy, contented with his lot. And I was an escaped convict—my life a life of degradation—all that makes existence worth the having was lost to me! Knowing what I was, knowing what he was, I was maddened! The wrongs of my blasted career called on me to avenge them. I did avenge them. There were knives lying on the table near which Kealwin was sitting. I seized one. I plunged it to his heart!"

The dead—dead silence in the room was only broken by the heavy breathing of the dying man, and the rustling of the paper, upon which James Hamperton had been taking down the more important points of his brother's narration. Egerton Crossley spoke first—

"You have confessed to us—have you confessed to one Higher than we are?"

"Yes—yes. There is hope for me?" This very eagerly spoken.

"There is hope for the worst!"

Upon Olivia, this scene coming so suddenly, so strangely, in all her worldly hopes and happiness, had a sobering effect which was not to be effaced.

"Dr. Kealwin died very wealthy, did he not?" whispered Crossley to James Hamperton.

Hamperton nodded.

"And left his fortune to a distant relative?"

Hamperton again nodded, and looked as he did so to Olivia.

"But the claim of her who has been hitherto known by the name of Blanche Legh outweighs all claims." This was spoken very low by Egerton Crossley to the solicitor.

"From this death-bed more complications will spring than I expected," thought Hamperton.

"Pray—pray for me," said the dying man, all force in his voice gone—"pray, pray for me as you have already done. And"—looking towards Petite—"you too!—you too—I loved your mother—so much—oh, so much!"

As Egerton Crossley had prayed by the side of soldiers dying upon the ground, unsheltered by any covering but that of Heaven, or in the ward of fever-haunted hospitals, so he prayed now—fervently, believingly, with lip and heart. And the man who had loved Cecile Marescôt, and then so terribly avenged his wrongs, and her own, died with Cecile's daughter kneeling by his bedside—her hands raised in prayer too, for his forgiveness !

### CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH MRS. CALLEY LEARNS THAT SHE IS  
TO BE DISAPPOINTED.

WHEN Olivia told her father that she had again seen one whom she had long thought dead, and that this fact made it impossible for her to do otherwise than break off her engagement with Robert Evershed, Mr. Bryant looked a good deal surprised ; but he did not say much. Very briefly Olivia told him of what had happened in India, and of the deep love which she had always had for Egerton Crossley. Mr. Bryant was satisfied with her explanation. Accustomed to allow his daughters to be their own mistresses



in the great as well as in the small affairs of life, it was impossible for him to put any obstacle in the way of Mrs. Prince marrying whom she chose. But I question if he had ever been in the habit of choosing husbands for his daughters, or of exercising any very particular supervision over the subject of their choice, whether he would have troubled himself much now. The new life of business upon which he was about to enter had charms for him, from which he was not to be drawn by domestic or social matters. The delights of speculation, with which he had as yet had but little personal intimacy, would seem at least to have been initia- tively satisfactory ; and he was looking forward eagerly to the time, when as Mr. Hamperton prophesied, he should become a man of monetary importance. To be a director of this company, a chairman of that, to wield, in short, some power in the commercial world, was a pleasure which Mr. Bryant looked forward to with all the enjoy- ability of a schoolboy looking forward to a cricket match, when he shall win personal distinction by a dexterous catch, or by skilful round-arm bowl-

ing. He had been a lazy, and an irritable man all his life: the prospect of having something to occupy his attention, and exercise his abilities, was all the more attractive from the contrast involved in it to all his past existence.

"I have written to Mr. Evershed, as openly and frankly as I can, to tell him that our engagement cannot be fulfilled. I have explained the reasons. I am sure he will release me."

So spoke Olivia to Mr. Bryant, on the first day that she had met Egerton Crossley again.

"Well, well, my dear, you know your own business best. We go into the country in a day or two, and before then I had better be introduced to Mr.—what's his name—Crossley."

"He is going to call on you to-morrow, at the hotel."

"Oh, very well. You've nothing more to say, I suppose, my dear?"

"Oh, no, papa."

"I hope he'll come early, for I shall be engaged by twelve o'clock. I have to meet my solicitor again at his office."

"Major Crossley will be here before then, papa."

Major Crossley was there early, but not before Mr. Bryant had begun to get very fidgetty, and had taken out his watch more than a dozen times. Mr. Bryant received the gentleman with all possible amiability, asked him a few questions, and then jumped into a cab and drove speedily to the office of his solicitor. It was on the evening of this day that George Hamperton told the story of his life ; and, having told it, died.

On the following morning, Mrs. Prince and Blanche Legh were sitting together in a private room of the hotel, whilst Mr. Bryant and Mr. Hamperton were closeted together in another. Mr. Hamperton looked a little more serious than usual, though he did not explain to his friend the cause thereof, and had more than once cautioned both Olivia and Petite to be silent, for some time, upon what had come under their notice. His regard for his brother was unaffected ; and, though business was not to be neglected for family griefs, his conduct was sufficiently subdued for any one to see that something unusual had happened to him. There

was a mass of papers, all bearing the same unmistakable physiognomy of referring to law, or to some kindred and equally agreeable science; and over this mass Mr. Bryant brooded thoughtfully, now and then passing a document to Mr. Hamperton, and requesting that gentleman to read a passage. Some of these papers referred to mortgages which Mr. Bryant held, and some of them were life policies, also held as securities by him. The time had come when this gentleman, in the heat of a speculative fever, artfully propagated by Mr. Hamperton, was about to exchange the advantages to be derived from such securities for the glories of joint stock banking, and the honour of elevating insignificant fishing villages into watering places, as important as Brighton or Scarborough.

"I don't know, Hamperton, but I rather fancy I shall want you to go into the country with me to-day. Can you spare time?"

"Humph! I might. What is it you particularly want me for?"

"To look over some papers which I have in my strong box at home. I thought they were

at Gregson's, my man of business, when I came up. I find they are not. They refer to a mortgage I hold on a man's property at Messingham; and, if I remember rightly, the mortgage deed is so worded, that I cannot call it in just when I choose. I almost forget the exact expression, and I shall be glad if you can read it; for I want to lay a hand on all the money I can."

"I am glad to hear you say so," responded Mr. Hamperton, without showing all the gratification he felt in the speculative ardour of his friend. "You leave town this morning, don't you?"

"Yes. I expect my daughter from Haystone, and we shall all go down into the country together. You think you can manage to spare time, and accompany me? There is a late afternoon train, by which you can return."

"Well, as you wish me to see this mortgage, I will certainly strain a point, and run down into the country with you; although—I did rather want to be in town to-day."

"But I hope I shan't put you to any inconvenience?"

"Oh—nothing to speak of."

"We leave this hotel in an hour. And now, if you like, we'll join my daughter."

And the gentlemen went where Olivia and Petite were sitting.

"What do you think, papa? I've persuaded Miss Legh to go into the country with us, and stay a little while."

"My dear, I'm very glad to hear it. Mr. Hamperton is going to accompany us, too."

"My stay will be a short one, Mrs. Prince—indeed, only a stay of a few hours."

The next moment the door opened, and Mrs. Calley entered. There was an angry glare in her dark eyes, which were fixed immediately upon Olivia Prince. Her son-in-law she scarcely noticed.

"And so, you've come to bid us good-bye, Mrs. Calley," said Olivia. "I expected you this morning."

"I've come to do nothing of the kind. What's this rumour I've just heard?"

"Rumour?"

"Yes. I don't see why I shouldn't speak of it

pretty plainly—about your having given up Mr. Evershed—is it true?”

“It is true that I am not going to marry him,” answered Olivia, quietly.

“Why——”

“I think, perhaps, we had better retire,” remarked Mr. Hamperton to Mr. Bryant.

“We are scarcely fit spectators of this scene!”

As he was moving towards the door, Mrs. Calley turned fiercely round to him, and said,—

“You’ve had some hand in this business—eh?”

Mr. Hamperton shrugged his shoulders:—

“Infer what you please, Mrs. Calley. If so, I have acted from the purest motives!”

“That I’ll be bound you have, James Hamperton. You are just the kind of man to act from pure motives! Go, then.”

Mr. Hamperton and Mr. Bryant left the room.

Frowning heavily, Mrs. Calley said,—

“Explain all this to me. I called here yesterday—you were not at home. Mr. Bryant, who was, told me that your marriage with Robert Evershed was broken off. When I

wanted him to explain, he said he could tell me nothing further ; for he had been too busy to enquire of you all the circumstances of the case. What are they, Olivia ?”

“ It is not for me to explain them to you yet. If I were the only one affected, I might be more explicit than it is possible for me to be now.”

“ You have broken with Robert Evershed.—Why ?”

“ I never loved him.”

“ I know you well, Olivia Prince ; and I am sure you did not break off your engagement because you did not love him. You are too worldly a woman—too proud—too ambitious—to refuse a rich man’s hand merely because you did not care for him.”

“ I have been so, Mrs. Calley ; all that you have said—worldly—proud—ambitious. I have pretended to love, when I thought my pretended love would place me in a good position, and surround me with what my heart coveted. I have ceased to pretend to love when I have found that I should be disappointed, or when I



have seen a better chance—a wider sphere. All this I confess—all this I readily confess!”

“Olivia, you are an exasperating woman! You have not now told me why you refuse to become Robert Evershed’s wife?”

“Because one whom I loved years ago, and thought dead, has come across my path again. Because I love him, and dare not be unfaithful to him!”

“When did you meet him—and how?”

“I have said that I am not in a position to explain everything. Some day all may be told.”

“Who is this old lover? Is there any mystery about him?”

“None whatever. His name is Egerton Crossley.”

“You loved him in India?”

“Yes.”

“And left India thinking he was dead?”

“Yes.”

“I wish to God he had been.”

Olivia could not refrain from smiling.

“You are at least very kind,” she said.

"I have spoken the truth. I wish he had been dead, or that you had married Evershed before you saw him again."

"Thank you, Mrs. Calley."

"I'm disappointed in you, Olivia. I wished you to have been Robert Evershed's wife above everything. Who could have believed this would have happened?"

"Certainly not myself. When I left Mesingham for London, the very last person I expected to see was Egerton Crossley."

"James Hamperton had something to do with your re-meeting this Egerton Crossley as you call him, had he not?"

"It was through him certainly that I met him again."

Sarah Calley bit her lips.

"I suppose Robert Evershed knows what you have done?"

"I wrote to him the day before yesterday, so I may conclude that he does."

"Olivia, you have utterly disappointed me. I shall hate your husband, and I shall hate you. I wonder what cause James Hamperton had for

interfering in what did not the least concern him? What interest had he in bringing you and this Egerton Crossley together?"

"I am not aware that he had any interest. Indeed, I am sure that he had none."

"You can never be sure of that man. He's been with your father a good deal lately; do you know why?"

"On matters of business, I suppose," answered Olivia, carelessly.

Sarah Calley fixed her eyes steadily on Mrs. Prince, and merely echoed her words—

"On matters of business."

"Well, Mrs. Calley, "if I have disappointed you, I hope you will forgive me. You have said again and again that you hoped to see me a happy woman. As the wife of Egerton Crossley I shall find that your wishes are gratified."

"I don't care for Egerton Crossley—he's nothing to me. You've acted like a fool, Olivia—like a fool! I shall never care for you again."

"Don't say that, Mrs. Calley."

"I will say it, for I always say what I think. If James Hamperton had all I wish for intermeddling with your engagement to Mr. Evershed, that bald head of his would not look so shiny."

And here there was an interruption which put an end to the utterance of any further malevolent desires on the part of Mrs. Calley regarding James Hamperton. The interruption was caused by the entrance of Major Crossley himself. And he had not long appeared before Georgine arrived. Petite turned deadly pale when she saw that Georgine was accompanied by Lester Temple.

"I have come to take you home, Petite," said Lester, kindly.

"I—I am going down to Messingham," she answered.

"To Messingham!"

"Yes, Mr. Temple," answered Olivia, who had just introduced Major Crossley to Mrs. Calley; "we are going to take her with us."

"I rather expected such would be the case. Well, I've had my journey for nothing."

"Come down with us," said Olivia; "you were always a great favourite there, and I am sure Harry will be very pleased to see you again." In a whisper to him—"Miss Legh has told me all. I suppose I am to welcome you as a brother-in-law."

"My dear," said Mr. Bryant, "if we are going to Messingham to-day, we had better get ready for starting. We have barely three-quarters of an hour before the train starts."

"What a party we shall be," laughed Olivia, as she glanced round the room. "Won't you be one of us, Mrs. Calley?"

"No—not yet—I'm going—good bye all for the present. An old woman like myself is out of her element here. I am just going to your wife, Mr. Hamperton. Shall I deliver any message from you?"

"Tell her I shall be home in the evening."

Mrs. Calley, fixing her eyes steadily on him as she passed to the door, said in a whisper—

"You have been brewing some mischief; I can read you through and through. Beware!"

## CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH MR. HAMPERTON'S PRIVATE DESK  
IS OPENED.

VERY disappointed and very angry, Mrs. Calley called a cab, and told the driver to carry her to Bedford Square. Sitting backwards in the vehicle, you may be sure that her reflections were not very agreeable in their nature. She had, indeed, fixed her mind anxiously on a marriage taking place between Olivia Prince and Mr. Evershed; and to know that she was doomed to disappointment was exceedingly galling to a lady whose temper was none of the best, and who was in the habit of venting a miscarriage of her hopes as an injury directed

against herself personally. She fumed and worried. Unreasonable in her desires of finding a husband for Olivia, she was unreasonable in her anger against her when this lady chose to refuse fulfilling the marriage contract with Evershed. That Mr. Hamperton had been instrumental in bringing Olivia and Egerton Crossley together again she was well aware. Whether he had any motive in his work, or whether he had only been a disinterested instrument, she did not care to inquire: his finger had been in the unpleasant pie, and she was correspondingly bitter against him. But for him Olivia would have been standing in her old relationship to Robert Evershed, and Mrs. Calley would have been gratified in one of her dearest wishes.

“James Hamperton, I always hated you,” she said, “and I shall continue to hate you to the end. If I could procure your undoing, I would go a long journey, and spend a great deal of money.”

With such sentiments she arrived at her son-in-law's house, and was ushered into

the room where that son-in-law's wife was sitting.

"Jane," she said in a cutting voice, by way of salutation.

Jane looked up, and saw that her mother's face was unusually ominous. The sharp features were sharper than ever ; and the keen brown eyes were keener than ever. Mrs. Hamperton was in no humour to be lectured by her mother to-day. She thought she had grief enough of her own, and had no wish to share in the grievances of others.

"Mother," she said, timidly.

"I've just seen your husband, who has gone into the country. He told me to tell you that he should be back this evening. I dare say you'll be glad to see him."

"Oh, mother! mother!" whimpered Mrs. Hamperton, "I have discovered more! I have seen—oh—" but the poor lady burst into tears, and was unable to go on with her touching narrative. Though Mrs. Calley's first impulse was to sneer at the tears, she suppressed it, and said—



"Well, you have seen who?—what?"

"I have seen the person who has supplanted me in my husband's affections."

"Oh, you have, have you? And I'll be bound she's pretty; trust James Hamperton for falling in love with a good-looking girl."

The covert cruelty of this speech was too much for James Hamperton's wife, and she burst into fresh tears.

"You have been a wronged woman all your life, Jane," said Mrs. Calley. "I've known this—you have been too good for your wicked husband. It is getting time that somebody should put a spoke into his wheel."

For the last eighteen or twenty hours there had not been a more miserable woman in all wide London than Mrs. Hamperton. The result of her having watched her husband was a result that might have been expected. Fully believing that she must discover something discreditable to him, she had attached significant meanings to actions of the most innocent nature, and a purport to words to which they were not entitled. She had encouraged her suspicions when there was no

cause ; and she had seen what had no existence, save in her own distempered imagination. James Hamperton's matrimonial career had by no means been faultless ; but, as yet, he had been able to allay his wife's suspicions when they were at all troublesome, and by a gentle tact he had sent her, now and then, in search of most disappointing mares' nests. A loving woman, she was naturally a jealous one ; as yet, however, her husband had so managed matters that her jealousy had never burst forth into any one great fire. It had smouldered and smouldered, springing out now and then into fitful jets of flame, which a little sprinkling from the watering-pot of affection, very soon cooled : it now threatened to assume a violence which boded no good luck towards her imaginarily offending husband. There was but one interpretation that she could place upon what she had witnessed last night : James Hamperton had ceased to care for her, and was deriving pleasure from the companionship of a younger and fairer rival. When he returned home very late on the foregoing evening, she was sullenly silent. On

ordinary occasions he would have eagerly inquired the cause of her silence, and have flattered her into good humour. A very serious incident had started up in the current of his life, and he was in no humour for indulging in any sentimentality. Entirely ignorant of what had happened, Mrs. Hamperton interpreted his conduct as that of a man who was consciously guilty of some very discreditable shortcomings; and when he left his home on business that morning, she had said as few words as possible. Her husband, little guessing what was brooding in the lady's mind, made a remark, which, under the peculiar circumstances of the case, was not likely to put her into a better humour.

"How quiet you are, my love," he said, as he was leaving the room. "I fear you are not quite well. This heaviness suggests a torpid liver. You had better take a pill!!!"

All during the morning, until her mother's arrival, she had been wondering what she should do, or whether she could do anything at all. Trouble always upset the poor lady's power of calculation and suggestion. There, in her

agony, she floundered, incapable of devising any means for getting out of it. "She was the most miserable woman in all this large world," so she said again, and yet again: the tears pouring profusely down her cheeks every time she made the uncomfortable assertion. And here, at last, was her agreeable mother, with a grievance of her own, probing Jane Hamperton's wound, and making that wound throb with increased pain.

"And so you have at last convinced yourself that your husband is a bad man?"

"Oh, yes, mother! Oh, yes! How I wish I had never been born!"

"Fiddlestick!" quoth Mrs. Calley, kindly. "What's the good of wishing impossibilities. You had much better wish that your husband was dead."

Mrs. Hamperton gave a little shudder, and murmured forth:

"Only to think—only to think—that I have been so deceived!"

"Only to think—only to think," interrupted Sarah Calley, "that you should have been such

a fool all your life as not to discover that your husband was a worthless scoundrel! And now tell me all about it," she added. "You've watched your husband, I suppose? and watched, at last, successfully?"

"Yes." And then, with many tears, many breakings down, many expostulations, and apostrophes of self-pity, Mrs. Hamperton went into the particulars of the incidents which wrongly interpreted by her had shattered her peace of mind. Mrs. Calley listened grimly; and, when her daughter had brought her dismal narrative to a conclusion, she said, in a hard, stony voice:

"Make your husband pay, my dear, for his folly."

"What am I to do, mother?"

"Resent his injustice, of course. Jane—I believe—I have long believed—that he is a humbug: worse—a swindler!"

"A swindler?"

"Yes: a swindler! A respectable swindler, I'll admit; but a swindler, none the less!"

Jane looked aghast at her mother.

"You may stare. I know what I'm talking about. My brain hasn't began to soften yet. Your husband is a swindler, Jane—or my name isn't what it is."

"Who has he swindled — when — how?" blurted forth Mrs. Hamperton.

"He has swindled a good many people: he is doing it now. How does he do it? why, like many more respectable men. There, I've answered your three questions. I keep my eyes open, Jane—my ears open, too. He has been more than once looked upon with suspicion; but he's a clever man, and he can hoodwink sharp men just as he can hoodwink"—here she fixed her eyes meaningly on her daughter—"silly women."

"James Hamperton," Mrs. Calley went on, "has a great deal of business with public companies. I often see his name in the paper; and when I was talking with my man of business the other day, and telling him about the money that I had got your husband to invest for me; he smiled, and said—'Ah! that Mr. Hamperton is a wonderful man! I marvel how long the

people will believe in him !' And then he ran over the names of several companies with which he had something to do, as solicitor for them, or projector—companies which had all come to nothing—ruining, I dare say, a good many people ; but not James Hamperton. Your husband, Jane, is a dishonest man. The companies he gets up, are only got up for his benefit, and the benefit of a few more in his position."

"Oh, dear ! oh, dear !" said Jane Hamperton, trembling, "can this, indeed, be so ? I never thought——"

"That's quite true, Jane," said Mrs. Calley, waspishly, "you never did think, but think a little now, please, if you can. I will do what I can to make the process easy for you."

Mrs. Hamperton did her best to brace up her mental faculties, staring hard at her mother as that old lady eloquently defamed her son-in-law.

"When a lawyer doesn't follow his legitimate business," Mrs. Calley went on, "he is always to be suspected. I like a lawyer to be a lawyer,

not a projector of companies, a money-lender, or a dabbler in trade. I'm a prejudiced old woman, I dare say. You must know that your husband has long ceased to do very much at his legitimate profession. Haven't all his old clients, or nearly so, left him? I've heard him say so much himself, and go on in a fine way upon his aspiring spirit not finding a sufficiently wide sphere in the dusty world of the law, and so must you, Jane. I dare say his aspiring spirit didn't. There's nothing James Hamperton hasn't dabbled in, from patent locomotives to registered lucifer matches. Oh, yes, he may well talk of his aspiring spirit! His real character is unknown, but to a few it is not unsuspected. If I could get the key of his strong box, I should see things that he wouldn't like me to see for a trifle."

Poor Mrs. Hamperton trembled and wept. The old lady was too much for her, and she could say nothing in defence of her husband.

"Half measures won't do with James Hamperton," quoth Mrs. Calley, "and it won't



do for us to be squeamish if we wish to bring that rascal to book. No, no, we mustn't be squeamish !”

“ Mother, what do you mean ?”

“ What I say. Does your husband keep his papers at home ?”

“ I don't know. I think he does.”

“ When I was here the other day he was working in his *cabinet de travail*, as he called it. There's a big desk in it, with large brass clasps. That desk contains something, I'll be bound.”

“ But, mother !” said Mr. Hamperton's wife, meekly expostulating.

“ ‘ Buts,’ ‘ Ifs,’ ‘ Peradventures,’ make a fool's paradise, don't you know that ? Do you wish to live in your fool's paradise any longer ? I should think not. Your husband has done you an injury, and he'll do you a great many more, unless something is done to prevent him. Don't hang your head, Jane—look up—it won't do to whimper. You have found out that your husband is a rascal—treat him as such.”

The vicious energy of this old woman, fierce

of eye, rapid of voice, paralysed her weaker daughter, who was coming round to that temper which would lead her to follow in any path suggested by her wily and angry mother.

"Jane, Mr. Hamperton doesn't lock the door of his private room, does he?"

"No—no," stammered Jane.

"But he does his desk, I dare say. If I find it locked, though, I can smash it."

"Mother, don't!" cried Jane Hamperton, feebly; "pray don't!"

"Fool!" and the old lady started up. "I'd smash forty desks if I knew I was likely to do any good. I will satisfy my suspicions as to what James Hamperton is. I will—do you hear? And the only way for me to do is by breaking open his desk."

Trembling all over, James Hamperton's wife arose, but all her small power of expostulation was swamped by the masterliness of her mother.

"Where are you going?" asked Mrs. Hamperton, anxiously, as she saw Mrs. Calley walking quickly towards the door.

"To your husband's private room. You may come if you like."

Pressing her hands against her forehead and feebly wailing, Jane followed Mrs. Calley.

Smiling very grimly, she opened the door, passed quickly over the hall, and entered the room where James Hamperton spent a good deal of his time when he was at home. There was his desk, with its massive brass locks, standing in its usual place. When her daughter, who walked slower than herself, entered the room, she shut the door, slipped the bolt, and told her to sit down.

By way of comforting this poor lady, Mrs. Calley remarked—

"I dare say, amongst other things, we shall find some love letters received by your husband in that formidable-looking desk."

The shaft, so skilfully aimed, hit the right spot in Mrs. Hamperton's bosom; all her remaining strength of protest flowed out from the wound.

Mrs. Calley made a careful inspection of the desk. It was not an ordinary one, but had a

dignity unpossessed by the article in general use. Its clasps and locks were significant of the fact that its owner did not wish its contents to become the common property of the curious. Having carefully inspected it, Mrs. Calley looked about the room for a poker. There was a small one lying in the fender, which she took up, and dexterously went to work with this instrument of destruction on the clasps of the desk, her daughter looking on with a very tearful face. In a few minutes, admirably as it was secured, Mrs. Calley had accomplished her purpose of wrenching off the clasps, destroying the locks, and opening the desk.

"There!" she exclaimed, as she laid down the instrument by which she had so skilfully attained her ends—"There, James Hamperton, your secrets will soon be in my possession. Jane, my dear, my poor wronged child, I really think I have done this little business well!"

Such an affectionate speech as this she did not often favour her daughter with. But she

had accomplished a great end, and she could afford to be a little sentimental.

The various compartments of the desk were full of papers, and Mrs. Calley deliberately set about the task of making herself master of the contents of any which seemed to have a look of importance. Mrs. Hamperton now rose from her seat, and with tearful eyes began the inspection of the desk too.

“ You need not trouble yourself to read the papers; I’ll do that when I find any love-letters. You may be sure, my dear, that I will hand them over to you.”

Stabbed again; poor Mrs. Hamperton tottered away to her seat.

Mrs. Calley had not read many of the papers before she was aware of the general purport of most of them. Here were prospectuses of companies; here were ingenious plans for their organization; here were skilfully drawn up schemes by which companies were to be set floating; here were lists of the names of men who were to support them by their money or their influence. The unscrupulous ability, the

boldness of invention, the plausibility of suggestion of which these papers gave unmistakable evidence were subjects of admiration to Sarah Calley, who, with all her personal dislike to the gentleman to whom these plans owed their existence, could not refrain from exclaiming—

“What a head James Hamperton has!” The next moment she qualified her observation, by saying—“But what a rogue the fellow is!”

Upon one paper she bestowed very particular attention, differing as it did in some of its characteristics from the rest, and headed, H. & B.; which two letters occurred in every three or four lines. Its purport the keen old lady soon mastered. It referred to a scheme by which two persons were to be conjointly concerned in some large business enterprise—one supplying the necessary funds, and the other working them. Sarah Calley had no great difficulty in comprehending that H stood for Hamperton; but she was puzzled for a few moments as to the ownership of B. For a few moments only.

Suddenly she exclaimed—

“Bryant! Bryant! I see it all!”

“What have you found, mother?” wailed Jane Hamperton.

“That your husband is a rogue! Do you hear, Jane? I knew he was. These papers confirm it. There is not a greater rascal walking the streets of London now than he. From these plans here, I am sure he must have ruined thousands. Oh, he is deep—deep—deep,—but not too deep for me! He has his eye on a capital victim now; but I’ll warn that victim, before it is too late!”

Mrs. Calley selected a half a dozen papers, and placed them carefully in her pocket.

“When Mr. Bryant has seen these, he won’t care to be very friendly with James Hamperton any longer. All I hope is, that exposure may not be the only grief he comes to.”

“What—what are you going to do now, mother?”

“I’m going down to Messingham Priory, where your husband has already gone. You shall go with me, Jane, and we’ll just show Mr.

Bryant—poor foolish man—what kind of friend he has to give him advice in business. Oh, James Hamperton has got his eye on a pretty game!"

"I wish I had died before this day came," wearily said Jane; "I've so loved James Hamperton, and now to know——"

"That he is as false to others, as he is faithless to you," interrupted Mrs. Calley. "Well, well, treat him as he ought to be treated. As for me, I'm very glad that I have lived to see this day. Jane, get me a Bradshaw. We must go into Essex. Mr. Hamperton spoke of returning to-night. We will see him and Mr. Bryant before he returns. The mischief he is at will soon be done. A Bradshaw!"

"I haven't one. My husband always keeps it in his pocket."

"What's that?" enquired Mrs. Calley, as she pointed to a coat, hanging on the wall.

"It's one of James's coats."

"Perhaps that contains it."

And without further ado, Sarah Calley proceeded to put her hand into the various pockets of



this coat. Happening to be the overcoat in which Mr. Hamperton generally travelled, it contained his Bradshaw. Mrs. Calley soon found this very useful work, and in bringing it forth, she brought out several letters. The eyes of Jane Hamperton were on her during this proceeding, and they fell quickly on a letter, the envelope of which was directed in a lady's handwriting. Her jealousy fired immediately.

"Now we shall find that James Hamperton is doubly bad," said Mrs. Calley, as she coolly began reading the letter. Mrs. Hamperton stood trembling near her.

"What does it say? Who is it from?" she asked, in an anxious voice.

"It doesn't refer to any mischief which personally concerns you, Jane," answered Mrs. Calley, when she had read a letter which had evidently puzzled her. Read it for yourself."

Mrs. Hamperton read it, aloud. It was written by Sibylla Proby.

Mrs. Hamperton looked at Mrs. Calley, and Mrs. Calley looked at Mrs. Hamperton, and then both looked at the letter again. Jane had fully expected to have discovered a love epistle;

certainly it referred to matrimony, but not to the matter apprehended by James Hamperton's jealous wife. Its significance soon made itself apparent to Mrs. Calley.

"I see! I see! Sibylla Proby and your husband have been at work together. And so I may attribute the breaking off of Mrs. Prince's engagement to Robert Evershed to this young lady. She shall be exposed as well—the intriguing minx! Jane, I'll put that letter with the rest of the papers. Now, give me Bradshaw; I want to see when the next train for Messingham leaves Bishopsgate." (Bradshaw gave her the necessary information.) "We've now five-and-twenty minutes. Go and put on your things, Jane. I'll tell Susan to run for a cab."

"If I didn't fear that my husband had ceased to care for me, I would have no hand in this work," sighed Mrs. Hamperton, as she left the room; "for a wife to turn against her husband——"

Mrs. Calley interrupted her:—

"Fudge! You are only doing your duty.

## CHAPTER V.

### SETTLING.

WHEN the Bryants and their friends had been at Messingham an hour, and Mr. Bryant with Mr. James Hamperton had retired to the former gentleman's study to discuss business matters, and more particularly to inspect that mortgage deed which was rather puzzling in some of its expressions to Mr. Bryant, Robert Evershed, riding over from Langbourne, came in sight of the Priory. Knowing the day when Mrs. Prince would return, he was determined to see her, and ask her to be a little more explicit than her letter had been, as to the causes which

made it impossible for her to marry him. He was also determined to see Mr. Bryant on the same subject. Olivia had written very kindly and very politely; and indeed had, in her opinion told him all that it was necessary to say; but Mr. Evershed chose to be dissatisfied with her explanation, and wished to know more. He was terribly disappointed, and terribly galled. And this was not because his love had the ring of the true metal in it. He had been fascinated by Olivia, and prepared to risk all chances of future happiness for her very fascinations, just as hundreds and thousands of other men have done before him. For Mrs. Prince he had been faithless to Sibylla Proby. For Mrs. Prince he had chosen to be indifferent to an honest and a deep passion. And now that the sham thing had failed him, he was proportionably indignant; and to know moreover that he had sacrificed his self-esteem for a worthless purpose, made the wound of his disappointment smart more than ever.

Thinking in this fashion, he dug his spurs into his horse's flanks more fiercely than ever,

and rode on towards Messingham Priory at a furious rate.

Thwarted, galled, miserable, Robert Evershed went on his way. There was the Priory in front of him ; and he would soon know more particularly the causes which had led to his discomfiture.

Temporarily forgetful of Robert Evershed's existence, in his business fervour, Mr. Bryant after turning over the contents of his iron chest, at last discovered the desired mortgage deed which he handed over to Mr. Hamperton.

"Just read that and tell me what you think of it. From what I can remember, I fancy it was rather queerly worded. Places me at a disadvantage—doesn't it?"

"Oh ! no ; two thousand five hundred placed in some of our schemes will pay a better per centage than it does now. 'Pon my soul I wonder that people can be such donkeys as to be content with 'the sweet simplicity of the three per cents,' or the only trifling better per centage, on mortgage of four-and-a-half. But times are changing. A revolution is being rapidly consummated. So great, so magnificent,

are the demands of civilization that money, which has been travelling in a stage coach, must, metaphorically speaking, go by rail now—or to be more expressive, by electricity !”

James Hamperton had hardly uttered this magniloquent sentiment, before the door opened, and Mr. Evershed appeared.

“ I do not wish to trouble you, Mr. Bryant, or to unnecessarily occupy your time,” he said, “ but I should like to hear from you how it has come to pass that Mrs. Prince wrote me this letter.” Saying this, he handed the note, which had apprised him of Olivia’s determination, to her father.

“ My dear Mr. Evershed,” said Mr. Bryant, in an evident tone of vexation, “ I don’t understand much about these matters. I fully sympathise with you. But—but I don’t think I am the proper person for you to come to !”

“ As the father of Olivia Prince, I thought possibly that you might at least, not be indifferent to her happiness, or careless of the person whom she married !”

"Nor am I. Nor am I! Far—far from it. But—but—" And here Mr. Bryant failed.

"Allow me to ask you a question," said Robert. "Am I to understand that she broke off her engagement with me, with your sanction?"

Mr. Bryant looked a little troubled. "Mr. Evershed, I never thought it my duty to interfere. Mrs. Prince is, as you are aware, a woman in years. She has been married before. In short——"

Mr. Bryant wanted to get back to his Joint Stock plans. To trouble himself about love affairs, was a thing this gentleman never did; and he was least disposed to do so at the present time.

"I should at any rate like to be made acquainted with the circumstances which led to Mrs. Prince's so suddenly, so unexpectedly breaking off a contract which was to be consummated in so short a time."

"Mr. Hamperton," said Mr. Bryant, turning to that gentleman, who, gathering up the papers, had glanced occasionally at Robert, as if this gentleman had assumed some unusual interest

in his eyes. "Mr. Hamperton, you know more about the affair than I do. Perhaps you will afford Mr. Evershed the necessary information. There was an old lover—a prior engagement—the gentleman is here. In fact—Pray explain, Mr. Hamperton. Pray explain."

"Before I give the necessary explanation," said Mr. Hamperton, with appropriate sententiousness, "that is, so far as I am at present at liberty to do so, let me assure Mr. Evershed that he has my fullest sympathies, albeit, I confess that I was in a measure instrumental in bringing Mrs. Prince, and the gentleman whom she is now about to marry, together. My fullest sympathies! A disappointment such as he has been called upon to suffer is, I am rejoiced to say, a disappointment, which owing to the nature of things, does not occur many times in a lifetime. It is apt to unhinge the mind of the strongest, and to cause the stoutest-hearted person to quail! When Mr. Evershed knows what I am about to tell him, discovered in some measure by accident, I am sure that he will acquit Mrs. Prince of any inconsiderateness with regard to his feelings ;



and will be prepared to admit that her conduct has been guided by a spirit which would do honour to her sex—!”

“That’s enough, James Hamperton! That’s quite enough! Keep your sentiments for another day. You’ll want something better than sentiments to bring out in a minute or two!”

Hamperton started: Robert Evershed started: Mr. Bryant started—the eyes of all turning suddenly at this voice to the door. There stood Mrs. Calley, and there stood Jane Hamperton. It was Mrs. Calley who had spoken.

“Mr. Evershed,” she said quickly to Robert, “I am sorry for what has happened to you. I don’t know that I can give you any help; but I may,” she fixed her piercing eyes on her son-in-law—“I may show that specious-talking man up in his proper colours!”

“Mr. Hamperton,” continued Mrs. Calley, “there’s a letter for you. It was given to me just as we started!”

He looked at it, without opening it. His curiosity to do so was not equal to his curiosity to hear what Mrs. Calley had to say against him.

Her unexpected appearance, her unexpected threat had thrown him a little off his balance.

"Mr. Bryant," she said, "I have come here to warn you against a knave, and I hope to save you from ruin. James Hamperton is that knave; and so sure as your name is what it is, and his name is what it is, your ruin will follow from your having anything to do with him."

"Mrs. Calley," cried Hamperton in a tone of moral indignation, "I am at a loss to understand what you mean."

"If you hadn't interrupted me, you would have known sooner," she said curtly. "You might know that you were discovered, by your wife being here. She is my daughter, and I don't wish her to be a companion to a rogue. Be quiet. I will prove that you are one. Did you ever see these papers before?"

And she produced the schemes.

James Hamperton winced. "How did you get those?"

"It doesn't matter. Look at those papers, Mr. Bryant. Read them. And then tell me whether you will have anything more to do with him?"

Mr. Bryant took the papers in a bewildered way, looking first at Mrs. Calley, and then at James Hamperton. As he read them, or tried to read them, Mrs. Calley went on speaking.

"Those things refer to schemes which James Hamperton set on foot, and which dishonourably failed. It is the man's business to set on foot companies which are made to fail. He gets his living by this profession," pointing with her finger to one paper. "You see that name. 'The Great General Benefit Fund Association.' Don't you know the pretty history of that, Mr. Bryant? I do. I know all about it. Look in the 'Times' of May 19th last year, and there, I believe, you will see its nice history. The paper is in the hand-writing of James Hamperton. It was he who fathered that disreputable undertaking. Look at this other paper. 'The Grand Irish Mining Company' headed. Didn't that figure gloriously in the papers five or six months ago? Look at the other papers. Don't they show you what James Hamperton is, though he has managed to keep his connexion with them un-

known. A pretty pickle you'll find yourself in if you have anything to do with him!"

The cold perspiration stood in big drops upon Mr. Bryant's forehead. "I—I don't know what to do. I—Mr. Hamperton—explain—ex——"

In a lofty tone of voice that gentleman spoke—

"I wish to know, Mrs. Calley, how you came into possession of these papers, and other private memoranda. Who has dared to invade the privacy of my room? Who has dared to unlock the desk containing those documents?"

"Fudge, James Hamperton! Fudge. Nobody believes in your grand manner. At least I don't; and what's more, I never did. You hear? Mr. Bryant wishes you to explain. Do so, if you can; and make out that I am a liar!"

It was not often that James Hamperton found an antagonist who could beard him. That antagonist was before him now; and he felt that sentiment, bombast, or boasting, would avail him nothing before Sarah Calley. Somehow, he began to get conscious that the game was up.

Mr. Bryant did his best to master the signi-

ficance of the papers which Mrs. Calley had placed in his hands ; but owing to the confusion into which his mind was thrown, he was unable to do so. He had implicitly believed in Mr. Hamperton. This gentleman, in his estimation, was a commercial Jupiter, a man-compelling Zeus in all matters of a Joint Stock (Limited) nature. The funds at his command seemed enormous. The facilities for originating great and beneficial schemes of commercial endeavour seemed almost superhuman. The sagacity which foresaw ; the prudence which prepared for contingencies ; the skilfulness which governed the arrangement of various and involved interests—all these qualities, in the eyes of Mr. Bryant, had the stamp of unquestionable reality upon them. Though unable to comprehend a good deal that James Hamperton told him with regard to the working of those grand schemes which were to be so beneficial to society, and to result in such glorious per centages to the shareholders, he never for an instant suspected this gentleman of drawing upon his vivid imagination for facts, or of arguing from premises,

which were not unquestionably assured. The grandest dreams of Mr. Hamperton were to Mr. Bryant easily translatable into the solidest facts. He listened in a believing spirit : without questioning, he determined to act. And now—wonder of wonders, this great person whom he had trusted was accused of being a rogue, and the plans which he had set on foot were said to be the plans of a sharper, who only traded upon the credulity and the riches of those who were more foolish, and more wealthy than himself !

“Mr. Hamperton, can you deny the charge that Mrs. Calley has just brought against you in this room ? Is—is your profession what she says it is ?”

“I deny”——

“James Hamperton,” interrupted Mrs. Calley, “don’t tell any more falsehoods ; you have told enough in your lifetime. Mr. Bryant, if you want further confirmation of what that man is, I only ask you to read another paper which I have retained in my possession.” And she handed him the document, headed H and B, grimly saying :

"I somehow fancy that H stands for Hamperton, and B for Bryant."

Mr. Bryant, who had got the better of his bewilderment now, read this paper, taking in all its meaning, word by word. With an angry face, upon concluding it, he turned towards the clever solicitor.

"I see—I see now. Your plan was indeed a clever one. I was to be made a cat's-paw by you. After what I have discovered, Mr. Hamperton, it is scarcely necessary for me to say that your presence in this house"——

"Should be as short as possible," interrupted Mr. Hamperton. "I understand you, sir. I do not wish to remain in a false position. If you choose to be guided by the ravings of a malicious old woman, who, to my profound astonishment, has thought fit to be my enemy through life, who has poisoned my wife against me, and who, in her last act of mad hostility to myself, has only acted as I might well have supposed she would act. Well! well! well! if such is your intention, I have no more to say! I am," grandly turning towards Mr. Bryant,

and addressing him with his loftiest air, "I am to understand that it is your purpose to withdraw from all the engagements to which you, had in a measure, pledged yourself?"

"Certainly it is."

Mr. Hamperton made another magnificent bow, and remarked :

"A rural existence is, I must admit, not favourable to the cultivation of the intellectual powers. If your character is what I conjecture it must be from what has been transpiring in this room, during the last quarter of an hour, perhaps you do well to keep yourself aloof from the excitement and the responsibilities of business in town ; your capacities, excuse my saying so, are not equal to the line of life you had set before you."

Having thus grandly delivered himself, and temporarily extinguished Mr. Bryant, James Hamperton took up the letter brought by Mrs. Calley, and proceeded to read it, with an air of affected indifference ; but this air of affected indifference was not worn by him long ; his face turned deadly pale ; there was a slight tremor



in his hand ; then he clutched the chair, as if for support.

The epistle was from his head clerk, and ran thus :

“ A tremendous row in the city. And everybody is asking for you. Shares in the ‘ Aërial Transit Company,’ are at Zero ; ‘ Grand Germanic Baths,’ falling fast. Our ‘ New Insurance ’ trembles : so does the ‘ Fashionable Watering Place.’ Everything is going to the devil. As you are known to have been concerned in all these, people are full of inquiries about you. Your absence from the city to-day is remarked as suspicious. If your new ‘ milch cow,’ Bryant, fails you, you had better lie *perdu* for a time. I’m getting alarmed ; and shall take a trip to Boulogne to-morrow. I advise you to do the same. “ S. SCALING.”

The crash had come at last. The blow was overwhelming. If he had only arranged with Bryant a few days before, he would have been able to face the storm. Now all hopes in Bryant were gone. James Hamperton fully

realised the catastrophe. The ghastly pallor on his face deepened : the tremor in his hands increased. His wife took alarm, and hurried forward towards him, addressing him by his name. That voice steadied him. In a moment or two he had commanded himself ; and said, in a tone of irony : " As you helped to bring this mischief on me, Mrs. Hamperton, I presume you will be glad to know that I am entirely ruined. This note apprises me of so much. I sincerely thank you for your wifely action."

" James ! James !" burst from the lips of the poor woman.

" Perhaps you will be kind enough to let me know what motive you had in joining with your malicious mother to expose and humiliate me. I am at a loss to know how I have wronged you ?"

Mrs. Hamperton shuddered, and looked timidly towards her mother. That worthy lady came forth in explanation.

" You know, James Hamperton, that you have committed the greatest wrong against a wife that a husband can commit. You have

been suspected : you have been watched. Do you wish me to say anything further to your shame ?”

“ I am aware that I have been suspected, and aware that I have been watched ; and I am sure that neither ridiculous suspicions, nor underhand watching of my movements, could reveal anything. Of this, I say, I am sure.”

“ James Hamperton, your own wife has watched and seen you and another together. Carry back your memory to last night ”——

Before Mrs. Calley could say another word, James Hamperton interrupted her with a gesture of command to which even she was compelled to submit. His courage had returned to him ; his glorious impudence giving him power to ride through any difficulty was his own again.

“ I know now what you are going to say ! ” he cried, assuming an imperious attitude ; “ and I am happy to say that I have it now in my power to assure you and my foolishly jealous wife, that you have both been blundering in a way which does little credit to your wonted feminine sharpness of perception. If it is not

in my power now to vindicate my commercial integrity (though I shall be able satisfactorily to do so in a day or two) it is at least in my power to vindicate my moral rectitude. Allow me to ring the bell ?”

As he gave the bell a masterly pull, which sent its sound pealing loudly through the house, every person looked at James Hamperton with profound astonishment. He had assumed a new position, and with it all his old vigour of voice and sprightliness of look. Mrs. Calley was once more his inferior.

## CHAPTER VI.

### "SETTLED."

To Robert Evershed, who had been a passive spectator of the scene, Mr. Hamperton now addressed himself.

"I was interrupted in my explanation by the entrance of Mrs. Calley and my wife. Allow me to remark that the measures I am about to take to vindicate my character from the unworthy suspicion with which my wife has thought fit to regard it, will at the same time place you in full possession of the particulars which have led to your disappointment. Strange to say, Mr.

Evershed, our two destinies have become involved."

Here the servant, in obedience to the bell, appeared.

"Present Mr. Hamperton's compliments," said that gentleman, "to Mrs. Prince, Miss Legh, Major Crossley, and, indeed, to all the grown-up members of Mr. Bryant's family, and request them, in my name, to come here." Then to Mr. Bryant as the servant left the room—"I trust you will excuse the liberty I am taking, but the sacred interests of truth demand it."

Before the door again opened there was a strange silence in the room. Mrs. Hamperton looked very alarmed, Mrs. Calley angry and wondering. As for Mr. Bryant, he was in a state of profound bewilderment. Robert Evershed could scarcely be described as less so. James Hamperton turned over Scaling's letter again and again, but was otherwise undisturbed.

In a few moments the door opened, and those persons to whom Mr. Hamperton had

despatched his compliments and his message entered : Major Crossley, Olivia Prince, Blanche Legh. Lester Temple and Georgine were also of the number. Sibylla Proby was not.

"A crisis has come in my life, Major Crossley," began the imperturbable Hamperton as soon as the door was shut. "It is necessary that my character, in one light, should stand clear and untainted. By your explaining the nature of your relationship with me, from the evening when we first met until last night, you will disabuse my wife of some absurd suspicions, and at the same time cause her to know that her hostile measures against me were provoked by no adequate reason whatever. These prefatory remarks are, I believe, sufficient. Please begin your statement of vindication."

Major Crossley, content to let his curiosity as to what had happened in Mr. Bryant's study remain in abeyance, proceeded to comply with the request of James Hamperton, looking now and then to that gentleman for approval, or for hints, lest he might be saying too much.

"I first met Mr. Hamperton at St. Belcham's some weeks ago. He was interested in a per-

son in whom I was interested. This person was—I may say who he was, Mr. Hamperton?—this person was his brother. He had been unfortunate. Indeed, I suppose I may state the whole truth. He had been transported for forgery. His sentence was for life; his return, therefore, to his native country was illegal. When I first met him he was a miserable man; as he told me, he had added crime to crime, crime to crime. I felt it my duty to interest myself in his welfare, and I did what I could to give him consolation. I believe Mr. Hamperton did not meet his brother before I met him. Mr. Hamperton brought him to London, obtained lodgings for him, and visited him. I visited him too. Taking into consideration the peculiar circumstances under which he had returned, and taking into further consideration the knowledge of a crime which he had committed after his return to England, and of which I knew nothing until yesterday, his brother thought it necessary to observe as great a secrecy as possible about this person. His health was not good, and it was unlikely that



he would live very long. When his death occurred the need for this secrecy would exist no longer: nevertheless, as long as he was alive, it was well, in my opinion, to have regard to it. I was aware that Mr. Hamperton's movements were being watched, but I hoped that time would explain all things, and that he would not be put to any inconvenience or trouble for his great consideration towards his most unhappy brother. I visited his brother daily, and so did he. It is possible that but for having been brought into close relationship with the two Hampertons I should never have met with Olivia Prince again. A few accidentally spoken words by me were the means whereby Mr. Hamperton guessed my past history with Olivia Prince (whom I had met and loved years ago in India), and I was brought to meet her again. This, parenthetically——”

As Major Crossley was speaking these last words, James Hamperton turned his eye upon Robert Evershed, as much as to say, “Now you know all about it.”

“Last evening,” Major Crossley went on,

after a moment's pause, "George Hamperton died. His brother was with him in the morning, and with him then. His absence during the day was due to his having been despatched from his brother's bedside to bring there a young lady whose history the dying brother well knew—a history he thought it his duty to make known before he was no more. I hope"—(turning to James Hamperton)—"that I am not making too free with any confidence which may have been reposed in me?"

"Not at all, Major Crossley; all that you know you may state openly. The motives for my concealment are operative no longer."

Mrs. Hamperton drew closer to her husband, pitifully seeking to get a glance from him. Mrs. Calley frowned upon Major Crossley, and frowned upon James Hamperton, but she said nothing.

"In the course of the afternoon of yesterday," Crossley said, "Mr. Hamperton brought to the house in Bloomsbury Miss Legh——" The eyes of Mrs. Calley, of Mrs. Hamperton, turned now particularly to Petite, who was shrinking

behind Mrs. Prince—"to the house where George Hamperton was dying to hear what he had to say relative to her and her antecedents. In the solemn prelude to death the dying man made a statement which I for a moment cannot dispute, and which, fortunately, circumstances will allow us to verify. This statement referred to her birth and parentage. A dying man does not often tell lies. It seems that George Hamperton had, years ago, received some bitter wrong at the hands of a Doctor Kealwin (this latter having stolen from him a woman to whom he had been deeply attached), and that, upon his return to England, he had avenged himself by murdering the man who had wronged him. So much he confessed yesterday in my presence and in the presence of Mrs. Prince, Miss Legh, and his brother. Furthermore, he solemnly averred that Blanche Legh was the legitimate daughter of Dr. Kealwin."

"Enough at present," said Hamperton. "You see, Mrs. Calley and Mrs. Hamperton, that you were egregiously mistaken. But for knowing that your gossiping propensities were not to be trusted, and that your amiable mo-

ther could easily succeed in gratifying her curiosity at the expense of your weakness, I should have told the whole story to you, Mrs. Hamper-ton. Appeal to Miss Legh, who accompanied me to London and whom you saw with me, and she will corroborate what Major Crossley has spoken."

She thought it unnecessary to appeal to her ; the folly of her jealousy was patent.

She turned a pleading face to her husband, and with a sobbing voice said—

"Oh, James ! James ! I have been wrong—I shall never forgive myself. But for——"

"I understand. But for your affectionate mother you would never have turned my enemy—I believe so—I fully believe so." Then speaking in a tone of intense severity, and turning indignantly towards Mrs. Calley, "You have caused your daughter to intrigue against her husband for some purpose. Enough—now that I have had an opportunity of vindicating my aspersed character, and of having gratifying testimony brought to show that I am not the monster which some of my friends would wish to prove me. Enough !"

James Hamperton bent a grand glance upon those assembled, and awaited, as it were, the next breeze of fortune with a hero's resolution.

"Excuse my putting a question," said Robert Evershed; "but you must be aware that one or two of the statements made by the gentleman opposite have a special interest for me. Is it possible that Dr. Kealwin had a daughter?"

"Yes," responded Hamperton; "unknown to him. The necessary evidence which will be completed immediately, can be given you by Major Crossley in a short time." Pointing to Petite—"She is his daughter."

Evershed glanced towards Lester, and was silent. Things had, indeed, become involved. Nothing had passed between him and Olivia since her entrance into the room. She gave him a bright, kindly look: it spoke volumes. He knew that she had never loved him, and that he who was standing by her side now had her heart in unassailable possession.

Once more rousing her forces, Mrs. Calley said:—

"I know nothing of Major Crossley. I dare

say his story is correct, though. However, what he has told you regarding the story of his brother has no connection with what I have told you, Mr. Bryant, regarding him. It would be odd indeed if a man did not have some affection for his brother, though he might be as great a rogue as ever lived. But I have not done yet — no, I've not done yet. Major Crossley, I doubt not, is duly thankful to James Hamperton for his having brought him and Olivia Prince together, and believes him to have been influenced by the most generous motives. I think it is in my power to prove to you, Mr. Bryant, and you, Major Crossley, that the sympathetic *deus ex machinâ* was not entirely disinterested. I haven't done with you yet, James Hamperton. I've no doubt you fancy your last move a striking one, and that you are looked upon by several in this room as the incarnation of benevolence and consideration!" And here she took a letter from her pocket, and handed it over to Mr. Bryant.

"I opened your desk intentionally," said the old lady, looking at Hamperton; "but accident

—sheer accident, placed me in possession of Miss Proby's letter."

Mr. Bryant read it by himself, and then aloud  
It ran thus :—

"SIR,

"Information has reached me to the effect that the engagement between Mrs. Prince and Mr. Evershed is broken off. That such is the case I suppose I may attribute to your handiwork. I write to acquaint you that I am aware of what has taken place, and that in return for what you have done, you may rely upon my saying nothing to Mr. Bryant of your antecedents, and of what occurred between yourself and my late father.

(Signed) "SIBYLLA PROBY."

"What—what does all this mean?" he cried.  
"Miss Proby in league with you, Mr. Hamperton?"

"Don't you see her motive?" said Mrs. Calley, laconically; "it was to avenge herself upon Robert Evershed."

"Ring the bell," said Mr. Bryant. "Miss Proby must be summoned here."

In a few moments a servant entered, and left with a message for Sibylla Proby to come to the study. The persons at various parts of the room were speaking in under tones. Curiosity was at its height, and speculations were manifold, as to the antecedents of this last singular disclosure.

But here was Sibylla Proby.

Her face was nearly pallid ; her cheeks were sunken ; her eyes of lustreless black, spoke of bitter sorrow. Where was her glorious pride of movement and of beauty ? Humbled—humbled to the dust. Anguish had set its seal upon every feature, ploughing lines upon the forehead, drawing the beautifully formed lips into shapes which invited no love—which spoke of no passion. The hearts of the tender women in the room all pitied her, with the exception of Mrs. Calley. As for Robert Evershed, when he saw her once again, his heart turned cold within him. " If my beauty is marred, you marred it ! if my eyes are lustreless, it is because you cruelly withdrew the light of hope and love from them ! if I am



wan, and pale, and weak, and shrunken, it is because you promised to give my life a joy—gave it, and then, in cruel selfishness, withdrew it!" So, to his remorseful heart, spoke the unhappy sight before him.

One glance around the room sufficed to arouse Sibylla's suspicion of what had taken place. One glance towards Mr. Bryant, holding her letter in his hand, told her that all was known.

"I wish—I wish you to explain the full meaning of this note," said he, speaking with more severity than he intended. "Am I to understand that you and Mr. Hamperton have been virtually plotting against me? You will not, I suppose, deny that you wrote this letter which I now hold?"

"I do not deny it—I wrote the letter."

"What does it all mean? What are the antecedents of Mr. Hamperton, and what is that you know of as having transpired between him and your father? It has been brought to my notice that he is an unscrupulous personage. Therefore, you need not hesitate now about say-

ing anything which may be prejudicial to his character. It seems to me, as far as I am able to form any opinion upon the matter, that you have been actuated by a spirit of revenge."

"Revenge! Against whom?" cried Sibylla, with heightened voice.

"Mr. Evershed."

Sibylla clutched her hands together.

"Revenge! Never—never! I will confess the whole truth, Mr. Bryant," she said, after a pause, and a struggle. "I will confess it before Mr. Evershed. It is right that he should know what I am, as it is right that you should know why I have been acting as I have with you and your family. I will confess the whole truth!"

A pause, and glance towards James Hamperton; and Sibylla went on:—

"I wrote that letter, and I wrote it to Mr. Hamperton. According to a compact into which he and I entered, I promised to be silent to you, Mr. Bryant, about what I knew of him, if he succeeded in breaking off the marriage between Mrs. Prince and Mr. Evershed. I wrote that letter to acquaint him that I had heard the mar-

riage was broken off, and to assure him that I would keep my promise, and drop no hints as to what I knew of him."

"But what—what is it that you particularly know of him?" eagerly inquired Mr. Bryant.

There was another pause—Sibylla seemed to be reflecting. Then she went on:—

"Some months ago, when my father was living, and was well, Mr. Hamperton came to see us at Langbourne. He mentioned some speculations, which he desired my father to join. I acquit him of any evil motive for doing so. But for me—but for me, Mr. Bryant, my poor father would never have had anything to do with these speculations. It was I who persuaded him to yield to his advice. You understand this? For a time they succeeded. They failed at last, and my father lost all he possessed. It was in consequence of this disaster that I was compelled to come here. You wonder why I persuaded him? I will tell you."

A spasm shot across the face of Robert Evershed: a ghastly truth was being unveiled to him at last.

——“I loved Mr. Evershed. I believe he loved me. He told me so—again and again—and that he would make me his wife were his circumstances better. I wished to be no burthen to him ; nay more, I desired to assist him in the work, which he laid before himself for his life’s accomplishment. That I might be his wife, and of service to him, at the same time, I persuaded my father to listen to the counsel of Mr. Hamperton and to speculate ; believing that he might become a comparatively rich man in a short time, and that I might be benefitted too—and so bring Robert Evershed, if he became my husband, property which would render his work easier, and justify his marrying me. I did this. I did this. Oh—” involuntarily turning to Olivia and Georgine, “those who love—who really love, may guess how I was swayed to act thus. My plan succeeded for a while. My father, who loved me, ten thousand times more than I deserved, informed Robert Evershed’s mother, that I should bring my husband a worthy dower. Its amount was named. She was bribed thus to yield her

consent; and Robert Evershed was bribed too. We were to be married. At the risk of my father's—my own father's welfare, I was willing to buy the man I loved. His love was my world then—and I forgot duty—filial consideration—every tender tie that bound me to my father. It was I who persuaded him to speculate. Cast more blame on me than on Mr. Hamperton. This, I say openly, before you all.——”

She stopped a moment. Robert Evershed clenched his teeth, and dug his nails into his hands. Every word this unhappy woman spoke was a dagger in his bosom. Was not her miserable plight his handiwork? What had not her love for him made her do?

Sibylla went on with her confession:—

“All the speculations failing with which my father had to do, he died of grief and disappointment. Oh, God! I feel that it was my hand that struck his death blow. I threatened to expose Mr. Hamperton had he not represented to me the whole truth, wherein, I could only admit that I was as guilty as he.

When Robert Evershed knew that I was no longer able to bring him any marriage portion, the marriage was broken off. I went out into the world to seek my own living, loving him, loving him still. I had tried to buy him; and now that the bargain had failed, I knew the blame was mine—mine! I don't attempt to defend what I did. I only wish you to know what I did, and why I did it!"

Here was another pause. Sibylla sighed heavily. Of all the women about her, who could love, was there one that dare withhold her pity from the wretched creature now confessing?

"Circumstances brought me to this house. I had no hope that any chance would ever make it possible for me to become Robert Evershed's wife. I had resigned myself to my bitter fate. Its bitterness was increased a hundred fold by my knowing that I—had helped to kill my father. Then I heard that Robert Evershed had unexpectedly become rich. I thought he would seek me out—and fulfil his broken promise. When I heard of him again he was to be married to another, (slightly turn-

ing towards Olivia). I heard that he was to be married to you ! In this house I met Mr. Hamperton soon afterwards, and told him I thought it my duty to expose the part he had taken with my father, to Mr. Bryant, when he promised that if I consented to be silent he would sever the connexion between Olivia Prince and Mr. Evershed. Oh ! to have a chance of winning this man again, I agreed to be a party to a sin once more. I loved him as deeply, as madly as ever. As I had risked my father's welfare, so I was willing to risk your's. You know the meaning of that letter,—you know how wretched, how wicked I have been !—But," here some of her old pride came into her face—"I want no pity. I want no pity. I—I will go !"—

She half turned round—then staggered. Staggering, her face in all its piteous anguish turned towards Robert Evershed. The next moment she fell. With a shriek the women rushed forward, and Olivia caught her in her arms, before her body reached the ground. Robert Evershed wildly sprang towards her, and bent over her.

With clenched teeth, and hands tightly clasped, he said, under breath :—

"If she is dead, I am her murderer !"

That night she lay upon her bed, delirious, in fever ; and for many days she knew no one. There was one face often at her bedside, the haggard face of a miserable, conscience-stricken man ; but, for her, it was only a blank mask without meaning. Sometimes, Robert Evershed would speak to her ; sometimes, he would stand by in speechless agony, and wring his hands, and in his heart, curse himself for the folly of his pride. The real nature of his regard for Olivia was revealed now, as he gazed down upon this fever-stricken, wretched woman. The intoxicating dream, so familiar to him of late, had gone ; and how great his love for Sibylla had been, how deeply, and how closely it had woven itself about his inner being, he recognised, as death, with its most woeful accompaniments, —madness, that knew him not, and fever, whose fiery touch distorted the once lovely countenance, seemed to be advancing towards his victim with ruthless steps.



“Oh, my God, that I should have done this!” he said, one night, as he wrung Lester Temple’s hand, pointing with the other to the door of the room where Sibylla lay. “She will not live through the night; and she does not know me yet.”

The fever, and intermittent delirium had lasted six days. On the seventh, when morning had dawned an hour, and the bright early sunlight was stealing into the windows, Lester Temple came to Robert’s room, and told him to go to Sibylla. He had not gone to bed that night, but had lain down dressed as he was. Until now he had not slept for ten consecutive minutes; as Lester spoke, he was peacefully dreaming. At the voice, he started up alarmed. The face of his friend reassured him. The fever had left Sibylla; she was better, and knew everyone.

In a moment Robert was at her bed-side. The doctor and the nurse had considerably left the room, in order that the two should be alone for a few early minutes during this meeting.

There were traces on Sibylla’s face, as she

lay there on the bed, of the fierceness of the battle for life and death which had just been fought in her ; but there were evidences, too, that the struggle was over, and the fiat had gone forth that she should live. As she saw Robert once again, and recognised him, she smiled, and whispered his name. It seemed to her that she was as one awaking from a horrible dream, and like one so awaking, though she still suffered from extreme exhaustion, she realised that the brightness of day and happy living had succeeded the hideousness of nightmare and wretched stupor.

"Sibylla," he said. "You must forget the past, and live for me, and me alone."

"If anything could make me live, it would be to know that my life was to be passed with yours." She said this earnestly, though in a weak voice.

Robert was not allowed to remain with her long, at this first interview ; but the next day the doctor and nurse were more considerate. Sibylla's constitution was strong, and precautions which might have been necessary with weaker

persons, were not needed in her case. When Robert again saw her, her beauty seemed coming back to her. Without speaking, he bent over her ; and the new, better life, of which she seemed to have prescience, was begun with a passionate kiss of joy.

"Sibylla, I will never leave you again—never !"

"But—what you know of me?" she said, in some alarm.

"Hush ! say nothing of that. I love you all the better for it. I am to you what I once was. I have really only loved but you : my other love was folly."

"Robert !"

The sound of her own voice speaking this name seemed to be a charm bringing back to her the memory of past joys which she could think of without a shudder now. She heard herself again speaking that name in the sweet shades of Wyndon Grove, where Robert had first told her that he loved.

"I owe you a confession," he said. "I have been wrong ; I have been more wicked than

you. I did wrong to win your love as I did. I did wrong to sacrifice it to my selfish purpose. That purpose I now give up for ever. I have been suddenly made a rich man ; but from a few words said in this room the other day, I should most likely have received no benefit, had he who benefitted me, known that he had a daughter alive. All the property that I have received from him I shall restore to her. It has been a curse to me ! A curse ! I will not have a farthing of it !"

"But——"

"I will not touch a farthing of it," he repeated ; "and as for my old purpose of making our family what it was, that I of course give up with it. It led me to do wrong to you, as my wealth did. And both I renounce for ever. If I live, I will live for you !"

With all her woman's softness of voice for the man she loves, she deprecated this again and again, and yet again.

"Give up the property if you like, but do not abandon your purpose, for it is noble !"

"No, Sibylla ; it has ceased to be noble in

my eyes. I shall abandon it ; and, if you are willing, shall leave England."

"Leave England !"

"You will not mind ?"

"No, no. I will do what you will ; I will go where you will. It is enough for me to know that you still love me. Knowing that, life is full of joy to me !"

Strange, strange influence of her new born hopes. She seemed transformed. There was light in her eyes, joyousness in her voice, all womanly sweetness wreathed about her lips again.

"And you will have no regrets, Sibylla, in leaving England with me, for some colony ?"

"No—no—no—! for you will love me, Robert, for ever—will you not ?"

And the tone of voice in which she put the question implied how sure she was that her tenure of Robert Evershed's regained heart would never more be endangered.

## EPILOGUE.

### THE CRADLE OF THE FIRST BORN.

A YEAR and some months went by. To Lester Temple this period had brought a comfortable amount of fame in his beautiful profession, and something even more substantial than fame, though nothing like wealth. As, however, he is a man who doesn't care for wealth, he is perfectly satisfied with what he has got. His musical productions have been all very successful, and he has been quite taken by the hand by friendly critics. As yet, his achievements have not been in the highest walks of his art; but I should not be surprised to see him distinguish

himself with a musical work of the worthiest sort.

He lives chiefly at Haystone, in a very pretty house, not far from his mother's. It is a spring morning, and he and Georgine (for Georgine is his wife,) are sitting over their breakfast table. Georgine is as pretty as ever, but she is softened; and those friends of hers who charged her with being worldly, ambitious, and disagreeable, are inclined to marvel much at the transformation in her, as they had marvelled when they heard that she was about to marry a man whose social position was not very elevated, whose property was inconsiderable, and whose profession was artistic. The ordeal of trouble through which she passed before she confessed her honest, womanly love, was very salutary. And once married to a man whom, in spite of her vanity, her pride, her disdain, she was brought to love, the softening process became more apparent daily. I believe it is a profound mistake to suppose that the most unvaryingly amiable girls make the best of wives—the most loving of companions. Those who

have reined in their tempers, extinguished their petty vanities, curbed their ambition, bring their husbands a fund of love, to which the offerings of the other sort are poor in worth or intensity. This I know, that Lester Temple has never regretted having married a woman whose amiability was not an early characteristic, and that he has never found her old passions flashing up against his will.

Two letters are brought in, and placed severally in the hands of Lester and Georgine.

"Mine is from Sibylla," says Georgine, as she opens hers.

"And mine from her husband. Poor Bob!"

"And what says Sibylla?" asked Lester, when he had read his letter.

"I'll read you a passage here and there. Some of the epistle is not interesting to you men; but, at any rate, I'll begin at the beginning—(reading)—'We are very happy. If we have any regret at leaving our native country it is because we are deprived of the society of the friends who were once so kind to us. . . . ."



Robert, as I told you in a former letter, soon obtained employment, and, I am rejoiced to say, his position is getting a better one every day. He tells me that the hard practice he went through in England was an excellent preparation for his life here. I believe that he is happier and more peaceful than he has been for years: not one regret, he assures me, darkens his life for having surrendered the purpose which was the guiding one of his existence when he was at home, and for giving up the property which had come to him from Dr. Kealwin. You may judge how happy I am made in knowing that my love and my companionship suffice for him: Oh, how I trust and pray that they ever may! Can you not realize the honour experienced by a woman when she feels that she makes her husband's complete happiness, and knows that he has no regret for having forsaken so much for her? But do not think, dear Georginé, that I shall be satisfied with seeing my husband only one man among the many unnoticed people of the world! No. I regard him too deeply for that. I know that

he has great powers and resolution. What may he not make himself in this colony? Occasionally I allow myself to indulge in day dreams of what he may become. I am sure that he will not remain obscure. Seeing that he has indeed sacrificed so much for me, and professes to have no higher ambition than to be loved by me, ought I not to exert my influence in inspiring him with lofty aims? Oh, Georgine, I am happy—so happy with him! I once despaired of ever finding life otherwise than one long, weary pain. How facts have falsified my apprehensions! . . . . . We have one little girl. It has Robert's eyes, and is very, very pretty. How I should like you to see it! I wonder when, or, indeed, whether you ever will. Perhaps when you do it will be grown up to womanhood; and perhaps—but I am only a proud matron, and day-dreaming wonderful things as to what might happen in the event of your little one and mine ever meeting. You will know that I am happy when I can indulge in such fancies. . . . . Robert has just entered, and after having ascertained

whom I was writing to, says that he shall give your husband a line. I will allow him to describe more accurately than I have done his circumstances and his prospects. . . . . If you were not a mother yourself, dear Georgine, you would say I was infatuated because I write about my little child again. We have named her Blanche. Could we name her after a better woman? Little as I knew of Miss Legh, I saw enough to value her most highly, and when my better nature came back to me, to love her sincerely. In your last letter you said that she had never fully recovered. When you next write I hope to hear that she is quite well. . . . . Dear Georgine, when shall I see you and her again?' . . . . . There, Lester," said Georgine, "I don't know that there is anything more that you would care to hear. What has Robert told you?"

"That he's very successful and very contented, that if he likes he may become a man of note in Victoria; in short—ah, here are some friends coming over to breakfast with us."

Advancing towards the wide-open window

came Major Crossley and Olivia, followed by another couple. Who were this other couple? Mr. Arthur Somerton and a lady who was once Lilian Graham, now Mr. Arthur Somerton's wife, and the proud possessor of his affections.

Kindly greetings on all sides, friendly enquiries, and then the number at the breakfast-table pleasantly increased. And here is another arrival. Baby—baby in nurse's arms. Baby crowing, baby struggling, baby anxious to get to mamma, baby evidently regarding itself as the most important personage in the room. Baby is passed from one admirer to another. Baby receives all admiration as its due, but is altogether excellently behaved.

"Charming! so like its papa!" thus spoke Mrs. Arthur Somerton; but that propriety curbs her tongue, and her blushing husband is at her side, she might give utterance to a few philosophical speculations as to whether her own, if she had any, would resemble him. But I am very glad that she is much less philosophical with her husband than formerly, having, I suppose, discovered that the gentleman doesn't care for abstruse subjects.

Major Crossley and his wife having been for a time on the Continent, Georgine and Lester ply them eagerly with questions.

"Whom should we see at Boulogne," said Olivia, "but Mr. James Hamperton and his wife. He was as genial as ever, and looks forward to returning to England some day, when, as he emphatically expressed it, 'Persons having claims upon my property have the good sense to moderate their terms, and the uncertainty which, through previous misfortune, enveloped certain business transactions with which I had to do is cleared up by the revelations of the future.'"

"Hamperton all over," laughed Lester. "What a man he was. With all his unscrupulousness, there was really some goodness in the man. He was a perfect enigma. And his wife, Olivia. How was she?"

"Well—and as fond of her husband as ever. And he was as courteous to her as of yore. He is quite sanguine about coming back to this country, and eloquently explained to my husband a scheme which was to do an immense deal of

good, and realise an immense property. What was the scheme, Egerton?"

Laughing, the Major made answer. "He has some notion that the rarefied air of the higher atmosphere would be very beneficial in certain maladies, and fancies that if persons could be elevated there in balloons, and kept there for a time, they might get better. He tells me that he has invented a machine which will remain in mid-air for any length of time, and contain any number of people—patients, nurses, and doctors. A company will enable him to put his invention to practical use. It is most amusing to hear him enlarge upon this affair, so earnest is his faith that it can be realized."

All laughed most heartily at this: and in a few moments rose from the table.

"Don't hear from Mrs. Calley now, I suppose?" asked Lester, of Olivia.

"Never! She has not forgiven me. I have written to her two or three times; but I could get no answer. She rarely corresponds even with her daughter."

In a few moments there were two more parties

in the room. These were Mrs. Temple and Blanche Legh. So pale was the latter—so thin—so feeble (she had been wheeled over in her chair) that all the pleasant laughter died off from the lips of those who were talking: and they regarded her with tender commiseration.

Her eyes turned to Lester and his child, which he had just taken from its mother's arms; and to the earnest question, as to how she was, she said:

"Oh, I am better. I am so much better. Better than I have been for a long, long time." Georgine was very tender towards her, and kissed her affectionately.

"I hope, indeed, dear Petite, that you are better. We have the spring now, and with the brighter days, I trust you will get stronger. We heard from Sibylla this morning. Her little child is named after you."

"After me! It was very kind of her." And then her eyes turned again wistfully towards Lester's child. Her meaning was understood. The child so stout and healthy was placed in her arms.

"How strong and well it looks," she said.

"And you will get strong and well, dear

Blanche, during this nice warm weather," Lester remarked. Blanche made no reply, but only bent closer over the child.

After a while, Petite turned to Lester, and said :

"I want to speak a few words to you, Lester ;" for several persons in the room were sauntering towards the window, as if they were going for a stroll round the pleasant garden. "Just a few words. I won't detain you long. Baby and I shall be good companions until you return. Sometimes I do not like to see so many people as I have seen this morning ; but I feel so much stronger. Oh, so much stronger ; I feel as I used to feel when—when I was well."

"I'm glad indeed that you do," said Lester, unsuspectingly.

"We shall not be long, dear Blanche," said Georgine, who was the last to leave, having kissed her child and kissed Petite before she joined the others.

"Don't laugh, Lester : but I have made my will. Isn't it fun ? I want to know whether



you think I have done right by dividing the property which Robert Evershed insisted on giving into my hands between you and him. Though I may live for a long, long time, I thought, perhaps, it would be best for me to do this."

"You are very good and very kind, Petite; and I most sincerely hope that you may live indeed a long while—until the little fellow in your arms is a grown man, and can love you as I have loved you."

"I know, dear Lester, that you have loved me. I am so happy when I think of it. Now go. I have told you all. You think I have not done wrongly? Don't let me keep you any longer. Join the others in the garden. Baby and I will be quite happy together."

"If he tires you, Petite, lay him in his cradle. Don't fatigue yourself on his account, for you are not strong yet."

And Lester left the girl and the child together. He found his friends strolling around his pleasant garden, and he joined them, thinking that he and Georgine were very happy, and that Olivia and Major Crossley were so, too;

wondering at the same time, that this seemingly worldly woman had loved a man so different to herself, and that she had been so faithful in heart to his memory.

Was Olivia the Olivia of old ? Married to a man whose professional soldiership was but a type of his higher soldiership—so earnest in his feelings, so indifferent to what the world delights in ; had she forgotten what she once was, and become assimilated to him ? I cannot entirely tell. That she regards her husband most tenderly, that she is well satisfied with his love, I know ; but I do not know whether there has been any radical transformation in her. True wife to him she is, and he true husband to her. Perhaps the deeper spiritual union is yet to come.

Lester Temple returned to the house some minutes before the others. Entering the room where he had left Petite, he saw that she had risen from her chair, and carried the child to its cradle ; and that she was now bending over it.

Lester walked towards her, and kindly spoke to her by the old favourite name, noticing that

her lips were on the infant's face, and that the infant was asleep.

She made no answer.

"Petite!" he said again, in a voice of some alarm, stooping down as he addressed her.

Petite was dead.

THE END.

